



Experience A Country Christmas

Christmas season begins in Spain with Feast of Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8

P18 TRIBUNE SATURDAY NOVEMBER 25, 1997 S/U

Whether it's grandma's delicious fruitcake or the angel that's been in the family for generations, every family has traditions that makes Christmas special.

Many are based on the family's culture and the way ancestors celebrated the holiday.

People in different countries have their own ways of observing Christmas. The following are some traditions from around the world.

China: Although the majority of Chinese people are not Christian, those who are celebrate by decorating their homes with paper lanterns and their Christmas trees, called trees of light, with paper chains, paper flowers and paper lanterns. Santa Claus is known as Dun

Che Lao Ren, meaning Christmas Old Man.

France: The Nativity scene is the focus of the Christmas celebration in France.

Nearly every home displays one. The Réveillon, the grand feast of the season, is celebrated after midnight mass.

A traditional part of the meal is the buche de Noel, or Christmas log, a yule log-shaped cake.

The main-course of the feast varies throughout the regions of the country. In Alsace, it is goose, while in Burgundy, it is turkey with chestnuts.

Greece: On Christmas Eve, children travel from house to house singing kalanda, the equivalent of carols.

They usually are rewarded with sweets and dried fruits.

India: During the Christmas season, Christians in India decorate mango or banana trees and they adorn their homes with mango leaves.

Churches are decorated with poinsettias and candles for the Christmas Eve service.

Italy: To announce the beginning of the holiday season, cannons are fired in Rome.

A 24-hour fast ends with an elaborate Christmas feast and small presents are given. The main exchange of gifts occurs on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany.

Mexico: The main celebration in Mexico, las posadas, re-

enacts Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay in Bethlehem.

Beginning nine days before Christmas, representing Joseph and Mary's nine-day journey, families divide into pilgrims and innkeepers.

The pilgrims travel from house to house seeking shelter and are refused until they reach the house where an altar and Nativity scene are set up. Then, a prayer is said and the festivities begin.

Poland: Beginning on Christmas Eve, people observe a strict 24-hour fast, which ends with a Christmas feast.

In honor of the star of Bethlehem, the meal does not begin until the first star appears.

Once it does, a rice wafer

blessed by a priest, oplatek, is broken and shared by everyone. Then, the 12-course meal, one course for each apostle, begins.

Spain: Since the country's patron saint is the Virgin Mary, Christmas is a deeply religious holiday in Spain and the Christmas season begins on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Families rejoice and feast together on Christmas Eve, known as Noche buena or the Good Night. A traditional treat is turrón, an almond candy. As in many countries throughout Europe, children receive gifts on the Feast of the Epiphany.

No matter how varied, these customs put the holiday spirit in Christmas for those who observe them.

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