



# Festive Global Traditions



A Season  
to Share!



# Introduction

As the holiday season approaches, we are reminded of the timeless traditions that fill our hearts with joy, warmth, and connection. From festive meals to cherished celebrations, these customs bring us together in love and kindness, reminding us of what truly matters—our relationships with those we hold dear.

This collection of global holiday traditions invites you to explore the many ways people celebrate, each one offering a beautiful reflection of the values we all share: generosity, community, and the joy of being together.

At EPUT, we recognise the power of community, especially during this time of year, and this book encourages us to embrace our cultural differences and embrace the small joys that make this time of year so special.



# Shabe Yalda

(Iran)

Celebrated on the longest night of the year, marks the Winter Solstice. Families gather to share poetry from Persian poets like Hafez, along with pomegranates, watermelons, and nuts, which symbolise the cycle of life, rebirth, and the triumph of light over darkness. The night is spent storytelling, laughing, and connecting with loved ones as they await the arrival of brighter days.

## Don't Miss This!

Visit Tehran's Grand Bazaar during Yalda for a vibrant atmosphere filled with stalls selling pomegranates, nuts, and other festive essentials.

## Festive Fact:

The traditions of Shabe Yalda date back to Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions. The pomegranate, a centerpiece of Yalda, is a symbol of life and rebirth, with its red seeds representing the warmth of the sun returning after the longest night.

## What It Means to Me:

"Yalda is about cherishing time with loved ones, embracing hope, and celebrating life's cycles. For me, it's a night of connection and gratitude." —  
*EPUT Staff Member*



# Wigilia

(Poland)

In Poland, Wigilia, the Christmas Eve supper, is one of the most important traditions of the holiday season. Families gather for a festive meal that begins when the first star appears in the night sky, symbolising the Star of Bethlehem. The meal traditionally consists of 12 dishes, representing the apostles or the 12 months of the year. Meat is avoided, with fish, especially carp, being a central dish.

## Don't Miss This!

Visit Kraków's Christmas Market in Rynek Główny Square, where festive lights, carolers, and traditional foods create a magical atmosphere.

## Festive Fact:

Before the Wigilia meal begins, family members break and share an opłatek (a thin wafer), exchanging wishes for health and happiness in the coming year.

## What It Means to Me:

“Wigilia is more than a meal—it’s a time for family, reflection, and gratitude.” — *EPUT Staff Member*



# Nine Mornings Festival

(St. Vincent)

Unique to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Nine Mornings Festival begins nine days before Christmas. At dawn, communities gather to sing carols, dance, and enjoy cultural performances. These pre-dawn celebrations foster joy, unity, and anticipation, with mornings filled with vibrant music and shared excitement for the upcoming holiday.

## Festive Fact:

This festival has been celebrated for over 100 years and is found only in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Its origins are tied to the Advent tradition of early morning church services, which evolved into lively community gatherings.

## What It Means to Me:

“Nine Mornings is a time to bond with neighbours and start each day with laughter, music, and cheer. It’s unlike anything else.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

### Don't Miss This!

Wake up early to experience the carolling and live music at Kingstown's main square, where the community gathers in high spirits.



# Feast of the Seven Fishes

(Italy)

## **Festive Fact:**

The number seven is deeply symbolic in Catholicism, representing the sacraments, virtues, and days of creation. While it's widely celebrated by Italian-American families, in Italy, this feast is most popular in southern regions like Sicily and Naples.

## **What It Means to Me:**

"Cooking seafood dishes with my family on Christmas Eve is a labour of love. The Feast of the Seven Fishes is about cherishing food, faith, and family." — *EPUT Staff Member*

This Italian-American Christmas Eve tradition features seven seafood dishes, honouring the Catholic practice of abstaining from meat. Popular dishes include baked cod, shrimp scampi, and fried calamari, each symbolising abundance and the blessings of the sea. Families often gather to cook and share these meals together, creating lasting memories.

### **Don't Miss This!**

Visit Naples or Palermo during Christmas Eve to experience the bustling fish markets preparing for *La Vigilia*.



# Day of the Little Candles

(Colombia)

Known as *Día de las Velitas*, this Colombian tradition on December 7 kicks off the Christmas season. Families light candles and lanterns to honour the Virgin Mary, creating stunning displays of light in homes and streets. It's a night of reflection, celebration, and communal gatherings, filled with warmth and beauty.

## Don't Miss This!

Visit cities like Bogotá or Medellín, where streets and parks glow with breathtaking candlelight displays. Enjoy local festive foods like buñuelos and natilla.

## Festive Fact:

This tradition dates back to 1854 when Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception of Mary as church dogma. Lanterns, often handcrafted by families, add a personal touch to this vibrant celebration.

## What It Means to Me:

"Lighting candles with my family is one of my favourite childhood memories. It's a time of gratitude and hope for the season ahead." — *EPUT Staff Member*



# Lighting the Menorah

(Jewish Communities Worldwide)

## Festive Fact:

The menorah's candles are lit from left to right, symbolising increasing light with each day of Hanukkah. This celebration of resilience dates back to the 2nd century BCE and honours Jewish perseverance.

## What It Means to Me:

“Lighting the menorah with my family reminds me of resilience and the strength we find in coming together.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

During Hanukkah, families light the menorah each night to commemorate the miracle of the Temple oil lasting eight days. This ritual is accompanied by prayers, songs, and the sharing of traditional foods like latkes and sufganiyot (jelly-filled doughnuts), fostering connection and hope.

### Don't Miss This!

Visit Jerusalem during Hanukkah to see menorahs lit in public spaces and neighbourhoods glowing with candles. Try traditional foods like *rugelach* and *kugel* at local bakeries in Jewish communities.



# Takanakuy Festival

(Peru)

## **Festive Fact:**

Takanakuy means “to hit each other” in Quechua. The tradition aims to foster forgiveness and promote communal peace. The fights are watched by the whole community to maintain fairness and honour.

## **What It Means to Me:**

“For me, Takanakuy is an important reminder of the healing power of letting go. It’s not about violence but about allowing ourselves to move forward with peace and unity.”

— *EPUT Staff Member*

On Christmas Day, communities in the Peruvian Andes celebrate Takanakuy, a unique tradition of resolving disputes through symbolic fistfights. Dressed in vibrant traditional attire, villagers gather in a festive atmosphere with music and dancing. These “friendly” fights are seen as a way to clear tensions and start the new year with harmony.

### **Don't Miss This!**

If you visit Peru during Christmas, explore the festive markets in Cusco, where you can find handmade Nativity figurines crafted by Quechua artisans.



# Three Kings Day Parade

(Spain)

## **Festive Fact:**

the Three Kings Day Parade dates back to the 19th century and has grown into one of Spain's most vibrant celebrations. The parades are filled with a sense of wonder, as children eagerly await the arrival of the Kings.

## **What It Means to Me:**

"Three Kings Day is a time of magical moments and family fun. The joy of receiving a small gift or seeing the parades brings back the magic of childhood, and sharing the cake with my loved ones makes it even more special." — *EPUT Staff Member*

On January 6, Spain celebrates Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day), the arrival of the Magi, with grand parades, music, and joy. Families take part in the festivities, where the Three Kings distribute sweets to children and Roscon de Reyes. The tradition holds a special place in Spanish culture, as it marks the culmination of the Christmas season.

### **Don't Miss This!**

If you're in Spain for Three Kings Day, don't miss the *Cabalgata de Reyes* in Madrid or Barcelona, two of the largest and most spectacular parades in the country.



# Coastal Carol Singing

(Caribbean Islands)

## Festive Fact:

The Caribbean carols combine African, European, and indigenous musical influences, creating a vibrant fusion of sounds that reflects the region's rich history. It creates unity and transcends language barriers.

## What It Means to Me:

"Caroling with steel pans and drums is one of the most uplifting parts of the Christmas season in the Caribbean. It's a perfect blend of music, joy, and shared cultural pride." — *EPUT Staff Member*

In the Caribbean, Christmas carolling takes on a unique twist, blending multicultural influences and tropical rhythms. Groups of carollers visit homes, singing in multiple languages, from English and Spanish to Creole. The music is often accompanied by steel pans and drums, creating a festive atmosphere that's full of rhythm and joy.

### Don't Miss This!

Experience a tropical Christmas with house-to-house caroling in Barbados or Trinidad. Participate in *Parang*, a traditional Venezuelan-inspired caroling style popular in Trinidad and Tobago.



# Le Réveillon

(France)

## Festive Fact:

Le Réveillon means “awakening” in French. It’s not just a meal—it’s a moment of spiritual and familial renewal. This tradition dates back to the 12th century, when it was believed the midnight feast would help keep people awake for Mass.

## What It Means to Me:

“For me, Le Réveillon is the heart of Christmas Eve. It’s about cherishing the company of family and sharing moments of indulgence and joy that fill the spirit with warmth.” —  
*EPUT Staff Member*

In France, Christmas Eve is celebrated with Le Réveillon, a lavish feast held after midnight Mass. Families come together to enjoy luxurious dishes like foie gras, oysters, roasted meats, and champagne. The meal symbolises abundance and renewal, a time to reflect on the year gone by and to welcome the Christmas spirit in a festive and indulgent way.

### Don't Miss This!:

Explore the stunning Christmas markets of Strasbourg, known as the "Capital of Christmas." Indulge in festive treats like *bûche de Noël* (Yule log cake) and mulled wine at Parisian cafes.



# Owambe Christmas Celebration

(Ijebu-ode - Nigeria)

## Festive Fact:

Owambe, also spelled Owanbe, is a Yoruba term for extravagant parties in Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba people. These events are known for their grandeur, featuring elaborate outfits in matching fabrics (aso ebi), vibrant decorations, and lively entertainment.

## What It Means to Me:

“Christmas in Nigeria is all about community, music, and the joy of sharing. The owambe isn’t just a party—it’s a way to honour the season with love, laughter, and togetherness.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

In Nigeria, Christmas is a vibrant, community-centered celebration that culminates in an owambe—a grand Nigerian party filled with joy, music, and dancing. Families and friends gather on Christmas Eve for a festive carol service, followed by a spectacular fireworks display that lights up the night sky. On Christmas Day, the owambe kicks off, with tables laden with delicious dishes and lively music.

### Don't Miss This!

Attend an owambe during the Christmas season in Lagos or Abuja, where music and dancing create an unforgettable festive experience.



# Boxing Day Swim

(UK)

## Festive Fact:

The winter swimming became a tradition in the UK during the Victorian era. The ritual has evolved into a modern charitable event, where swimmers raise money for local causes while taking part in this exhilarating tradition.

## What It Means to Me:

“The Boxing Day Swim is one of the boldest ways to celebrate the season. It reminds me that the holidays are about pushing boundaries and supporting others.” —  
*EPUT Staff Member*



On December 26, the UK sees participants plunging into freezing waters for the annual Boxing Day Swim. This chilly tradition is often done to raise money for charity and to celebrate the season in a refreshing way. Thousands of brave swimmers take part, marking the continuation of festive cheer in a daring and community-spirited fashion.

### Don't Miss This!

Witness or join the famous Brighton Boxing Day Swim, where hundreds brave the cold waters. Enjoy a cosy British Boxing Day tradition: leftover Christmas dinner sandwiches with a hot drink.



# The Silent Christmas

(Cuba)

## Festive Fact:

Cuba officially reinstated Christmas as a public holiday in 1997, following a visit from Pope John Paul II. However, after years of suppression, many families had lost their traditions and had to rediscover or recreate them.

## What It Means to Me:

“Growing up, I never experienced Christmas. Moving to Europe gave me the chance to build new traditions with my children, learning from the beautiful celebrations here.” —  
*EPUT Staff Member*

In Cuba, Christmas was officially banned from 1960 under Fidel Castro’s communist regime, with celebrations deemed counterproductive to the country’s political ideology. For decades, Cubans were not allowed to openly celebrate Christmas. Instead, New Year’s Day, marking the rise of communism, became the only sanctioned holiday.

### Don’t Miss This!

Reflect on the resilience of those who rebuild joy in the face of adversity, a testament to the enduring spirit of the Cuban people.



# Presépio

(Brazil)



A beloved Christmas tradition in Brazil is setting up the presépio—a Nativity scene depicting the birth of Jesus. The word presépio originates from the Latin praeseptum, meaning "manger." Families, churches, and communities create intricate displays with figurines of Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, the shepherds, and the Wise Men, often surrounded by local Brazilian touches like palm trees.

## Don't Miss This!

Visit the city of Olinda, where large and colourful presépios are displayed in public squares, showcasing Brazil's artistic flair.

## Festive Fact:

The presépio tradition in Brazil was introduced by Portuguese colonists in the 17th century. Over time, it evolved to include regional influences, with some areas incorporating handmade figurines or life-sized displays crafted by local artisans.

## What It Means to Me:

"Setting up the presépio with my family is a cherished moment. It's about more than decoration—it's a chance to reflect on the meaning of Christmas and to celebrate our faith together." — *EPUT Staff Member*



# Six Dice Game

(UK)

## Festive Fact:

The Six Dice Game is played with a set of six dice, each with specific rules tied to the numbers rolled. It's a great way to turn gift-giving into an interactive game of strategy and chance. It's one of the most popular activities for family gatherings in the UK.

## What It Means to Me:

"The Six Dice Game makes gift-giving even more exciting. It's about the fun of sharing, stealing, and the joy of not knowing who ends up with which gifts." — *EPUT Staff Member*



A festive and competitive holiday tradition, the Six Dice Game involves players rolling dice to exchange gifts in a fast-paced, strategic manner. Everyone takes turns rolling the dice, and depending on the number rolled, they may have to give a gift, steal one, or hold onto their current item. The game adds excitement and a competitive edge to the gift-giving process, keeping everyone on their toes.

### Don't Miss This!

In the UK during Christmas, don't miss the stunning Christmas lights at London's Oxford Street or the enchanting Christmas markets in Edinburgh, with handmade crafts and mulled wine.



# Reindeer Racing

(Finland)

Finland celebrates the festive season with reindeer racing, a thrilling sport where reindeer pull sleds at high speeds in snowy arenas. This tradition honours the role of reindeer in Finnish and Sami culture, where these animals have been integral to daily life in the Arctic region for centuries.

## Festive Fact:

Reindeer have been essential to Sami life for centuries, providing transport, food, and materials for clothing. The races celebrate the bond between humans and animals in the harsh Arctic environment.

## What It Means to Me:

“Reindeer racing is more than just a sport—it’s about celebrating the resilience of Finland’s Arctic life and the strong bond between humans and nature.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

### Don't Miss This!

Visit Rovaniemi, the official hometown of Santa Claus, for reindeer sleigh rides and holiday magic. Experience the Northern Lights, a natural winter wonder that makes Finnish Christmas unforgettable.



# Yule Goat Parade

(Sweden)

The Yule Goat is an iconic Swedish Christmas figure, celebrated through parades and the creation of large straw goats. The tradition has its roots in Norse mythology, where the Yule Goat was associated with Thor, the god of thunder. The Gävle Goat is erected each year in the Swedish town of Gävle, and while it's a symbol of good fortune, it often becomes a target for mischievous acts.

## Don't Miss This!

Visit Gävle to see the famous giant Yule Goat, a beloved holiday landmark. Experience the Lucia Day celebrations on December 13, featuring candlelit processions and songs.

## Festive Fact:

The Yule Goat tradition originated with the Norse god Thor, whose chariot was pulled by goats. Today, the Yule Goat represents generosity, abundance, and the return of light during the winter solstice.

## What It Means to Me:

"For me, the Yule Goat symbolises the resilience of Swedish traditions. It's a fun reminder of the light and hope we carry through the darkest days of the year." — *EPUT Staff Member*



# Adventskranz

(Germany)

## Festive Fact:

The Advent wreath tradition originated in Germany in the 19th century. It was first created by a Protestant pastor named Johann Hinrich Wichern to help children mark the passage of Advent.

## What It Means to Me:

“For me, the Advent wreath is a beautiful reminder of the season’s spiritual significance. Each candle represents a step closer to Christmas, and lighting them with my family brings warmth and peace to our home.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

In Germany, one of the most cherished Christmas traditions is the Adventskranz, or Advent wreath, a simple yet meaningful symbol of the countdown to Christmas. The wreath is made of evergreen branches and contains four candles—one for each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. The new candle lit each Sunday builds anticipation and light as the season progresses.

### Don't Miss This!

Create your own Advent wreath at home, incorporating traditional German elements like red ribbons and pine cones, and light it each Sunday leading up to Christmas.



# Fireballs Ceremony

(Scotland)

## Festive Fact:

The Fireballs Ceremony in Stonehaven is believed to have Viking roots, with the fire representing purification and protection. Similarly, First Footing is steeped in ancient superstitions.

## What It Means to Me:

“The Fireballs Ceremony is an incredible sight that fills me with pride for our traditions. —  
*EPUT Staff Member*

In Stonehaven, Scotland, New Year’s Eve is marked by the dazzling Fireballs Ceremony. Participants swing bales of hay soaked in oil and encased in cages above their heads as they walk along High Street. At the stroke of midnight, the flaming fireballs are hurled into the harbor, symbolising the warding off of evil spirits and ensuring a prosperous fishing season in the year ahead.

### Don’t Miss This!

Join in First Footing with friends or neighbours—don’t forget to bring symbolic gifts like whisky or coal for good luck!



# Parol

(Philippines)

One of the most iconic symbols of Christmas in the Philippines is the Parol, a traditional star-shaped lantern made from bamboo and colored paper. These lanterns, representing the Star of Bethlehem, are hung in windows and streets, lighting up communities and bringing the spirit of Christmas to life. In addition to personal displays, parol design competitions take place.

## Don't Miss This!

Explore neighborhoods in Manila, where streets are lit up with massive Christmas light displays, rivaling any in major global capitals.

## Festive Fact:

The Parol tradition dates back to the 16th century, introduced by Spanish missionaries to guide people to church for the Simbang Gabi (night Mass). Over time, the lantern evolved from simple designs to elaborate, colourful works of art.

## What It Means to Me:

“In the Philippines, the whole country lights up for Christmas. Seeing every street, every house decorated with parols and Christmas lights brings so much joy and warmth.” —  
*EPUT Staff Member*



# Colindatul

(Romania)

## Festive Fact:

Colindatul is considered an important spiritual and social activity in Romania. While children typically sing colinde (carols), they are also seen as bringing joy and blessings to the households they visit.

## What It Means to Me:

“In my family, colindatul is one of the highlights of Christmas. I remember caroling with my friends as a child and being filled with joy as we brought festive cheer to the homes in our village.” — *EPUT Staff Member*



Colindatul is one of the most cherished and long-standing Christmas traditions in Romania, dating back to Medieval times. Groups of children, students, and even adults go from house to house singing traditional Romanian Christmas carols during the holiday season. The songs, which vary by region, often carry themes that glorify the birth of Jesus and reflect local customs and folklore.

### Don't Miss This!

Experience colinde in larger cities like Bucharest, where public performances of Christmas carols bring the holiday spirit to the heart of the city.



# St. Stephen's Day and the Wren Boys

(Ireland)

In Ireland, Boxing Day (also known as St. Stephen's Day) is a major holiday, traditionally marked by both religious observances and lively social activities. In the past, the Wren Boys—a group of men, often dressed in costumes—would visit homes in their communities, singing songs and playing traditional music. The group was called the Wren Boys as they would sometimes carry a dead wren.

## **Don't Miss This!**

If you're in Ireland, head to the local pub on St. Stephen's Day to enjoy a lively atmosphere with traditional music, pints of Guinness, and festive cheer.

## **Festive Fact:**

The Wren Boys tradition dates back to the 18th century. One popular tale suggests that the Wren Boys were responsible for capturing a wren, which was once believed to be an omen of misfortune.

## **What It Means to Me:**

"For me, St. Stephen's Day is about reconnecting with loved ones and enjoying a hearty meal and drink after the excitement of Christmas." —  
*EPUT Staff Member*



# Igbo Masquerade Festival

(Nigeria)

## **Festive Fact:**

Igbo masquerades are not just performances but sacred representations of ancestral spirits. The masqueraders are often chosen from secret societies and undergo rigorous training to embody the spirit they represent.

## **What It Means to Me:**

“The Igbo is a connection to our ancestors and a reminder of the values they’ve passed down. The stories and dances bring the community together in joy and reflection.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

In southeastern Nigeria, the Igbo Masquerade Festival is a vibrant celebration held during the Christmas season. Villages host elaborate masquerade performances featuring colorful costumes, traditional dances, and storytelling. Masquerades, known as Mmanwu, represent ancestral spirits and cultural heritage, blessing the community with prosperity, protection, and unity.

### **Don't Miss This!**

Visit villages like Enugu or Awka during Christmas to witness some of the most captivating masquerade performances in Nigeria.



# Winter Solstice and Dumpling Festival

(China)

## **Festive Fact:**

The custom of eating dumplings on the Winter Solstice originates from the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE). According to legend, the Chinese physician Zhang Zhongjing created dumplings to protect people from frostbite, and shield ears from the cold.

## **What It Means to Me:**

“Making dumplings with my family on Dongzhi is a chance to bond, share stories, and celebrate the blessings of togetherness.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

In China, the Winter Solstice (Dongzhi) is celebrated with family gatherings where dumplings are made and shared. This tradition symbolises warmth, unity, and protection against the cold months ahead. Dumplings, often filled with meat and vegetables, are shaped to resemble ears, inspired by an ancient legend. The festival not only marks the shortest day of the year but also celebrates the gradual return of longer days and light.

### **Don't Miss This!**

Visit northern China during Dongzhi to experience the rich variety of dumplings, with fillings ranging from pork and chives to lamb and leeks.



# Irish Carol Singers and Potluck

(Ireland)

## **Festive Fact:**

This tradition honours the women of the Magdalen Laundries, embracing the true spirit of Christmas through kindness, belonging, and hope.

## **What It Means to Me:**

“The Irish potluck and carol singing are a beautiful way to bring people together. Sharing stories and songs reminds us of the healing power of community and the joy of lifting others during the holidays.” — *EPUT Staff Member*

In Ireland, a heartwarming tradition involves inviting women from the Magdalen Laundries—historically, institutions for women in difficult circumstances—to join community potluck gatherings. These events feature traditional Irish carol singing, storytelling, and shared meals, creating an atmosphere of compassion and connection.

### **Don't Miss This!**

Visit local Irish villages during Christmas, where community potlucks often feature traditional dishes like *colcannon* and *barmbrack*.

As we bring this journey of traditions and celebrations to a close, we are reminded that the holidays are far more than dates on a calendar—they are moments that connect us across cultures, generations, and continents.

Each tradition we've explored tells a story, not just of festivities, but of love, resilience, and the shared human desire to come together in joy and reflection.

At EPUT, we cherish the diversity of our community, knowing that these differences enrich our lives and our work. This collection of traditions invites us to celebrate not only our own customs but also the beauty of learning from one another.

May the stories within these pages inspire you to embrace the season with warmth, curiosity, and kindness. Whether you're stirring pudding, lighting candles, or simply sharing a quiet moment with loved ones, know that these traditions, big and small, are what make this time of year so special.

*Your EPUT Family*

