

A
LOOK
AT
SPAIN
TAIWAN
GERMANY
URUGUAY
NEW ZEALAND
PHILIPPINES
CROATIA BRAZIL
CHRISTMAS ISRAEL
CANADA **AROUND THE**
THAILAND **WORLD**
KENYA MEXICO JAPAN
GUATEMALA PORTUGAL
UKRAINE GREECE WALES
ENGLAND COSTA RICA
AUSTRALIA SOUTH AFRICA

We asked BBFI missionaries a few questions about what Christmas is like where they serve. Their responses provide insight not only into what Christmas looks like around the world, but also the opportunities and struggles this season brings for our missionaries. We are thankful for all those who responded and we trust this article serves as a reminder to keep our missionaries in prayer throughout the Christmas season.

[\(continued\)](#)

Kenya: A big family day with a feast of goat, if the family can afford it. *Jerry & Sharon Daniels*

Brazil: When we first went to Brazil in 1973 the people weren't accustomed to giving and exchanging gifts on Christmas. This was done on New Year's Eve, which we have continued through the years in our churches. *Hank & Nancy Mantonya*

Canada: Every Christmas tradition in Canada is celebrated the same as in the States!
Greg & Nina Hunt

Wales: Crackers – round tubes filled with a paper hat (hat has to be worn during Christmas dinner), a joke, and a small novelty gift. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: Children go from house to house singing Christmas carols and sometimes they spread seeds around – wishing for a good harvest next year – and maybe getting candy or money.
Ron & Nancy Minton

England: Christmas lasts two days in England – Christmas and Boxing Day which is the day after Christmas. The story goes that on Christmas day the servants would be working for the family, then, on Boxing Day, the servants would have the day off and receive a gift from their masters. Even today, the milkman, postman, and others who serve you through the year traditionally are given some sort of token of thanks at the Christmas season.
Tom & Gail Gritts

Thailand: Christmas is viewed as an interesting "foreign" holiday. But, because of the potential for increased retail sales, the shopping centers try to promote celebrating Christmas. *David & Joy Speights*

Germany: We celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve by attending a church service, then go home for a special meal and the opening of presents. The 25th and 26th are holidays and family is usually invited over on those days. The main celebration is on Christmas Eve. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Taiwan: There are absolutely no Christmas traditions in Taiwan or in the Chinese culture. The current culture is picking up on the consumer side of Christmas. Many department stores decorate in some sort of a Christmas theme. A few stores even sell trees! *David & Cherie Green*

Philippines: Filipinos begin the Christmas season in September, so I decorate my tree in early September. Two of the delicacies eaten at Christmas are made with rice and are usually sold during the midnight masses before Christmas day. One is *puto bum-bong* made with sticky rice, sugar, and coconut flakes. It is dyed purple and put inside a small bamboo tube which is lowered into boiling water and steamed until done. Then it is removed and butter, sugar, and coconut flakes are added to the top. On the other hand, *bibingka* is made with ground rice, milk, baking powder, and egg and cooked surrounded by charcoal. Then topped with cheese, salted egg, and coconut flakes. Christmas Eve night is like a family reunion in a special family dinner called *noche buena*, eaten at midnight after mass. *D. Louise Warner*

Costa Rica: Tamales are made of chicken or pork that has been wrapped in plantain for cooking. They are shared with families and friends. Apples and grapes are popular, which can be bought in road side stands and of course in the supermarkets. *Anna Marie West*

Greece: The Greek people decorate sailboats, *karavaki*, or small ships, instead of trees, although they also decorate trees now as they embrace the Western culture. Greece's 3,500 islands influenced the use of the ship, as so many families had sailors who would return home for Christmas after a long time at sea. Wives would decorate a wooden boat to welcome the sailors home. It is also believed to be influenced by St. Nikolas, the patron saint of the seaman. This saint is celebrated December 6, which is the beginning of the Christmas celebration.
George & Luisa Dimakos

Spain: A few gifts are exchanged but mainly the gifts, especially for the children, are given on January 6 (*Día de Los Reyes*) where supposedly the wise men bring the gifts. There is a big parade in most every city on January 5 with three men dressed as Wise Men, many of them riding on camels, as well as floats, etc. As they pass through the streets of the cities, they throw candy to all the people gathered on the sidewalks. At the end of the parade, they usually present gifts to the Christ child in a manger scene in front of the local Catholic church or else distribute gifts to the poor.
Lavon & Carolyn Waters

New Zealand: Christmas comes in the summertime here, so instead of a white Christmas, hot cocoa, or sleigh bells, a Kiwi Christmas is more about sand, sun, and backyard barbecues. The national Christmas tree is in full bloom, the Pohutukawa. It's fish and chips (fries) on the beach. Topping Christmas meals off with *pavlova* (dessert), Kiwi fruit/berries and (real) unsweetened whipped cream. Yum! *Dalton & Paulette Walker*



Israel: We live in the land of Christmas and we are privileged to visit the church of the nativity and the shepherd's field and see the country flooded with tourists from all over the world.
Ramzi & Ruth Kammar

Uruguay: The holiday is called "Family Day" not Christmas. Some families start eating after midnight and stay up all night long.
Esteban & Emily Alvarez

England:

- Brussel sprouts with the Christmas meal
- Christmas pudding
- Pulling Christmas crackers at dinner with another person until they crack open revealing a small gift, paper crown, and a joke inside
- Mince pies
- The Queen's televised speech

Kevin & Sarah Pine

Mexico: *Posadas* – It is a re-enactment of Mary and Joseph going from house to house to try to find lodging. It is also accompanied by a piñata and a Catholic rosary. Many Mexican families will have their big Christmas dinner at midnight on Christmas Eve and celebrate most the night and then sleep most of the 25th. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Playing cricket on the beach and having barbecues on the beach Christmas Day. Large seafood meals for Christmas Day. Since it is summer, many families go away camping during the Christmas season. The day after Christmas, Boxing Day, is also a very big holiday and many people head to the beach for a barbecue. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

Brazil: Christmas celebrations in Brazil mostly have something to do with the Catholic church, especially in northern Brazil. Christmas Eve many Brazilian families meet at the home of parents to have a late supper close to midnight. Those who follow the Catholic church will watch the pope in a service from the Vatican. In our area there will be firecrackers lit both on Christmas Eve and for sure on New Year's Eve. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Portugal: Christmas traditions here are very family-oriented. The traditional Christmas Eve late night dinner includes cod fish, boiled potatoes, and greens. This dinner is followed by the opening of gifts. Then, for those who are faithful, the whole family goes to midnight mass, "Rooster Mass." Everyone sleeps in on Christmas and the family gets together for leftovers. *Dan & Rachael Smith*

South Africa: We live in the Southern Hemisphere and Christmas is in the heat of the summer. Our home is in a coastal city, so many people go to the beach and have a barbecue. You can imagine how funny it is to go to the shops and hear Amy Grant singing, "Walking in a winter wonderland!" *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Native Americans: In our ministries both in Hawaii and with the Native Americans (Navajo and Southern Utes) we saw the emphasis of Christmas was on giving gifts and parties, and much alcohol was involved. We always took the opportunity to teach and preach on the first coming of Christ and how all scripture regarding his first coming was fulfilled so we know the Scriptures on the second coming will also be fulfilled. *Bob and Verna Griggs*

Japan: Christmas in Japan is known by name only and totally commercial. All the stores go in for it big time and most of them think Christmas is about Santa Claus, not Jesus. Making money is what it's all about! Sound familiar? *Lavern Rodgers*

Croatia: In Croatia, people traditionally wait until Christmas Eve to decorate the tree. It is usually a fresh-cut tree, so it is rarely bought or cut more than three days before. The entire day is spent together as a family. Extended family arrives in time for lunch and everyone attends evening mass. *Kevin & Kristina Brown*

Guatemala: On December 24th, Christmas Eve, Guatemalan families celebrate together and eat the main Christmas meal. It is made of several traditional dishes, but it always includes some Guatemalan tamales. In some regions they are made of corn, and in others rice or potatoes. They can be sweet or not, and have several different ingredients inside like olives, prunes, peppers, chicken, or pork. Everyone waits until midnight to light fireworks to celebrate the birth of Jesus. A family prayer is said around the tree and it is the custom to open presents shortly after midnight. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman*

Q. DOES YOUR CULTURE RECOGNIZE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST AS THE FOCAL POINT OF CHRISTMAS?

- Yes No
- Brazil
- Costa Rica
- Kenya
- Germany
- Great Britain
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Israel
- Mexico
- New Zealand
- Philippines
- South Africa
- Spain
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- Ukraine
- Uruguay

In a way...

Wales: It used to, but Christ is slowly being devalued and less recognized. People are worried about offending Muslims. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: Officially they do because it is Russian Orthodox. But in reality few believe it any more. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

Taiwan: The word for Christmas in Chinese is *Sheng Dan Jie* which literally translated means "holy birth holiday." The sad fact is that although almost everyone here has heard the term, most of them have never even heard the story of Christmas. *David & Cherie Green*

Spain: Yes, they recognize the birth of Christ as the focal point but a lot of emphasis is given to his mother Mary more than to Jesus himself. *Lavon & Carolyn Waters*

Mexico: Yes, but much of the focus is on Mary. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Yes, but it is more commercial and more of a day off than a religious event. Businesses have a lot of parties and alcohol is usually a big part of the events and given as gifts. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

Brazil: The current culture still has recognition of Christ's birth. Mary is given a lot of emphasis as the mother of Jesus. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Brazil: In most of the churches, a Christmas program is put on, which helps children invite their parents to come participate (if they aren't Christians). Through the years, there have been many souls saved through Christmas plays portraying the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hank & Nancy Mantonya

Ukraine: I like the influence we have on our Ukrainian friends and helpers. They often want to do things like Americans and we have given several adult workers their first Christmas present. This makes it easier to influence them for Christ.

Ron & Nancy Minton

Germany: Our Christmas Eve church service. The auditorium is usually packed! *Linda Fitzgerald*

Thailand: Sometimes the local schools, out of curiosity about Christmas, will allow us to come and explain what Christmas is all about. We have actually been able to perform Christmas plays at the local schools to talk about the birth of Jesus.

David & Joy Speights

Philippines: All the wonderful lights and decorations remind us of the true meaning of Christmas. *D. Louise Warner*

Israel: Being in the Holy Land.

Ramzi & Ruth Kammar

Costa Rica: I enjoy having Christmas dinner and fellowship time with other missionaries.

Anna Marie West

Q. **WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS ON THE FIELD?**

Taiwan: Easily, the best thing is the opportunity to share Christ with people who have never once heard the Christmas story! To see their eyes light up in amazement is a highlight of my life. *David & Cherie Green*

Mexico: The season lasts until January 6, Day of the Kings. It feels like we get more celebration time. *James and Lori Bradley*

Greece: I like celebrating Christmas in Greece because we can still celebrate Jesus freely. I felt depressed when we were on furlough watching the media fighting Christmas in America.

George & Luisa Dimakos

Uruguay: Fireworks citywide, greeting the neighbors after midnight. *Esteban & Emily Alvarez*

Spain: The best part about celebrating Christmas on the field is that the Spanish people celebrate on the 24th and we can spend that time with church family. On Christmas morning we can celebrate as a family without conflicting with other activities.

Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery

South Africa: We love our Christmas services as Brent gets to play Father Christmas. We hand out numbers to each person at church and then call out random numbers. There is a table of kids gifts and a table with adult gifts. One gift we give out to the winning adults are frozen chickens for their Christmas dinner. It is always a big deal to win a Christmas chicken! *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Croatia: The best part of Christmas in Croatia is visiting the various Christmas markets near us – the food, and crafts are truly works of art.

Kevin & Kristina Brown

Guatemala: We are now accustomed to the huge firework display at midnight on December 24. It's bigger than anyone can even imagine. The U.S.A. celebration now seems small and peaceful. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman* 🎄

What is the #1 thing missionaries like least about celebrating Christmas on the field?

family not here with us...I miss my family...being away from so many of our family members...not spending Christmas with my family...missing grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles...not being able to be together with all our family...we always miss family...not being with family...to have extended family so far away...being away from our older kids and our families...missing that hug from grandparents and parents after opening their gifts...kids and grandkids are stateside...we miss family and friends.

Q.
**DOES YOUR
 CURRENT
 CULTURE
 RECOGNIZE
 SANTA
 CLAUS?**

Wales: Yes, but he is traditionally called Father Christmas, although that is slowly changing because of American influence.

Larry & Dixie Quade

Israel: Yes, but he does not have the important role like in past years. *Ramzi & Ruth Kammar*

Ukraine: Santa Claus is *Ded Moroz* - Grandfather Frost. In schools they have some plays about him, and his granddaughter - Snow Maiden (*Snigurochka*). Santa is not common, mostly in a few advertisements. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

England: The Santa for the British is called Father Christmas. He wears a longer red robe and is usually slimmer than the American Santa. In many families, the father will dress up like Father Christmas and pay a visit on Christmas Eve to deliver gifts. *Tom & Gail Gritt*

Thailand: Yes. Thai people believe that there are different deities for each "new year." The Chinese New Year is usually in February with its own deities. The Thai New Year is in April with its own deities. Christmas is often seen as the Western countries' "new year." Santa Claus is the deity who oversees Christmas. *David & Joy Speights*

Germany: We have Saint Nikolaus who comes on December 6. Children either receive a couple of small presents from him or the presents are left for them while they sleep; or they get a piece of black coal left for them in their shoe, if they've been naughty. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Uruguay: Papa Noel brings the gifts after midnight. No need to wait until the next day!

Esteban & Emily Alvarez

Philippines: Many children believe in Santa Claus as a gift giver at Christmas if you have been good. Children will hang a stocking out on Christmas Eve to receive presents.

D. Louise Warner

Taiwan: Santa is called *sheng dan lao gong gong* in Chinese which literally translated is "holy birth (Christmas) old man." The only thing they know about him is what is learned from American culture. An old man with a red suit and white beard bringing toys to children. *David & Cherie Green*

Greece: Greece recognizes Santa Claus but they call him Saint Basilis, a Greek Orthodox saint from Caesarea, Asian Minor. He died January 1, 379 A.D. and this is the reason they open presents on New Year's Day. *George & Luisa Dimakos*

Spain: Santa Claus is recognized but the influence comes from movies and American pop culture. *Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery*

New Zealand: A resounding, yes! Santa is huge and they celebrate with Santa parades in almost every small community to the largest of cities. Many churches will incorporate Santa into celebrating for the children. *Dalton & Paulette Walker*

Australia: Yes, some here call him Father Christmas from our English heritage, but Santa is more popular. Traditions are similar to America, but there is a legend that Santa has six white boomers (kangaroos) instead of reindeer which is a popular Christmas song here.

Dwayne & Valerie Keefe

South Africa: Yes, but he is known as Father Christmas.

Brent and Sheila Moeller

Brazil: Yes - It is kind of humorous to see a Santa Claus in outfit in the hot summer temperatures in Brazil, since December 25th is in our summer season. *Steve & Marilyn Trask* ▲

Santa Claus



Father Christmas



Saint Nikolaus



Ded Moroz



Kenya: Christmas tree and house decorations. Baking cookies, a big Christmas dinner, get together with other missionaries. We don't do a lot of shopping. *Jerry & Sharon Daniels*

Wales: We always start listening to Christmas music on Thanksgiving. A Christmas family tradition that we still do is have Mexican food on Christmas Eve. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: We still put up a small tree and give a few gifts, but not as much as in the States. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

Germany: I get together with friends on Christmas Day. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Philippines: I still decorate for Christmas with a tree and lights and drive around our neighborhood to see the lights. I still get to hear caroling from young people who come to my house. I do not write or send Christmas cards. *D. Louise Warner*

Taiwan: We love to decorate for Christmas. We put up a tree each year and we try to decorate with lights on the outside, making us the only house in our community with bright lights! People like to come by and take pictures! On Christmas Eve, as a family, we go to each of our church families' homes and carol for them at their door and give them a plate of cookies! *David & Cherie Green*

Greece: We decorate the traditional Christmas tree as well as the ship. We exchange Christmas gifts, specially for the children, which we open on Christmas day. We do not decorate or teach about Santa Claus. *George & Luisa Dimakos*

Uruguay: We no longer have lights in our front yard – they will not last! We still sing with family and read the story of Jesus' birth. *Esteban & Emily Alvarez*

Spain: As a family, we meet on Christmas day with our traditional turkey and dressing (if possible) dinner and exchange gifts. We decorate our home with a traditional manger scene and sometimes with a Christmas tree as well. It is important our neighbors see we are celebrating Christmas since the Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate and many times they feel all "evangelicals" are the same. *Lavon & Carolyn Waters*

Spain: We celebrate on Christmas morning. We have a Christmas tree, stockings and a fire in the fireplace. *Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery*

New Zealand: In our home, we decorate in a slightly American traditional Christmas tree, manger, lights, etc...but use things common to the summer season like butterflies and summer flowers. We still observe our family traditions and have added ones from here (barbeques, NZ traditional foods, tried the beach once but very crowded). *Dalton & Paulette Walker*



England: We put up our Christmas tree and decorate the house. We hang stockings on our mantel. We bake Christmas cookies and treats to enjoy. We have Christmas services and fellowship with our church. Our Christmas looks very similar to what we have always done, we just do not have our families around to celebrate with. *Kevin & Sarah Pine*

Mexico: We have a Christmas tree in our house, stockings, hang lights outside, and celebrate pretty much like we did in the States. However, much of the candy we find in our stockings has chili powder on it. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Gathering with family to exchange presents on Christmas day. Big Christmas day meals. Going to church on Christmas day. Decorating the home with a Christmas tree and Christmas decorations. House-to-house Christmas caroling isn't popular where we are. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

South Africa: We have tried to maintain the same family traditions we had while we were in the States. We felt like that was/is important for our kids growing up on a foreign field. My wife still cooks the turkey in the oven even in spite of the heat and humidity! We certainly don't have snowball fights! There are traditions we love to keep like listening to "The Twelve Voices of Christmas," produced by Back to the Bible. We also put "Proclamation Ornaments" on our tree. Each ornament gives one of 25 different names of our Lord Jesus connected with his incarnation. *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Croatia: We still decorate our artificial tree the day after Thanksgiving, open Christmas PJ's on Christmas Eve so we can look cute for pictures on Christmas morning. We don't have a traditional Christmas dinner, but we video chat with family for most of the afternoon. *Kevin & Kristina Brown*

Brazil: We have, over the years, when possible met at the home of a fellow missionary in the area for a Christmas dinner. Caroling is not a practice here. Especially in the north, communities have events on the 12th of January celebrating the arrival of the three wise men. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Guatemala: We had to decide not to use a manger scene in our home like we did in the U.S.A. Here, other believers view that as idol worship, so we chose not to use that in our celebrations. We still do use a big Christmas tree, but we share with Guatemalan friends and believers that it is not an item of worship, but only a decoration as we celebrate our savior's birth. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman* ▲

THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, WILL YOU MAKE IT A PRIORITY TO PRAY FOR YOUR MISSIONARIES?