



### Christmas in Germany

The celebration of Christmas is deeply rooted in German society. For many people, it is the most important time of year, full of traditions and cultural history. Starting in the fall, shops sell special baked goods like gingerbread, cookies and “stollen” in preparation for the Christmas season. Many towns organize a Christmas market. Lights, special figures, and Christmas trees help create a festive spirit in people’s homes. Friends and colleagues get together for Christmas parties at work and in their clubs, as well as privately.



#### **Presents and a perfect mood**

Christmas reminds us that God reached out to humanity in the person of Jesus in an absolutely unique way. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, God’s greatest gift to the world.

That is the reason Christians exchange gifts with each other at Christmas. Sadly, for many in Germany, the exchange of gifts has become more important than the celebration of Jesus’ birth. During Advent, which is what the weeks leading up to Christmas are called, people can get caught up in a shopping frenzy. They search for the perfect present, trying to create the perfect atmosphere for the perfect celebration. Many Germans see Christmas as an annual festival of love, of family and of peace in the world, sometimes forgetting its Christian roots.

#### **Church services and the Christmas story**

On Christmas Eve, the 24th of December, church services are well attended. Even many who may not have a deeply personal belief in God traditionally go to church on Christmas Eve. These church services are open to the public, and everyone can come. Guests from other cultures and religions are welcome, too. In many of the services on Christmas Eve the children act out the story of Jesus’ birth in a short theatrical sketch, called a Nativity Play:

The parents of Jesus had to travel a long way from their home to take part in a census. In Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary only found a barn to stay in, so Jesus was born in the most humble circumstances. Simple shepherds were the first people to hear about the birth of the saviour, from the angels of God. Later, a star lead a group of wise men to the place where Jesus—the son of Mary—was staying.



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The figures of people and animals you may see in churches and some homes also display this story. They are called Nativity Scenes.

### ***A special season***

Christmas services are characterized by a special festive atmosphere, through music, liturgical texts and lighting. It's worth going to one of these Christmas Eve services just to get a sense of the Christmas spirit. Don't be surprised or offended, though, if people leave the service quickly without the usual after-service socializing. They are going home to celebrate with their families, as is customary.



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During the Christmas holiday, the 25th and 26th of December, Germany slows down. Almost all the shops are closed and people withdraw into their family circles. Christmas is usually celebrated with just the closest family members; grown children visit their parents and in-laws. Therefore it is neither impolite nor unusual, for friends and acquaintances not to be invited to such a family gathering. Christmas celebration just with the immediate family is a long-standing tradition.

Another holiday, New Year's Eve, is celebrated shortly after Christmas on the 31st of December, often with loud fireworks. It doesn't actually have anything to do with Christmas, but rather marks the transition into the next calendar year.

We hope that during the Christmas season you get a glimpse into the true meaning of Christmas, and that you might be able to celebrate as well. We wish all of you a very merry and blessed Christmas!