

Advent Traditions around the World (Advanced)



Name:

Date:

Which Advent traditions in other countries do you know?



Advent traditions around the world

Read three short texts about Advent celebrations in different countries. Then answer the questions.

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Iceland



In Iceland, Advent is a time of exciting folklore and familial traditions. We celebrate with the tales of the Yule Lads, thirteen mischievous pranksters who descend from the mountains one by one starting on December 12. Each night, children place a shoe on their window sills, and a Yule Lad leaves a small gift or a rotten potato, depending on the child's behavior. Growing up, I remember the thrill of waking up to see what the Yule Lad had left. Over time, the Yule Lads have become more benevolent figures, akin to Santa Claus, but they still hold a unique place in our culture. Some criticize this shift, arguing it dilutes our rich folklore and the traditional values of discipline and good behavior.

An Icelandic adult sharing stories about the Yule Lads with children, in a cozy living room with Christmas decorations and a roaring fireplace.

Mexico



In Mexico, Advent is a time filled with vibrant celebrations and deep-rooted traditions. Starting from December 12 with the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, we have daily processions called Posadas from December 16 to 24, reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for shelter. As a child, I loved participating in these processions, singing carols, and breaking piñatas. Over the years, some of these traditions have evolved, incorporating elements from the United States, like Christmas trees and Santa Claus. However, the heart of our celebrations remains. Critics often point out the increasing commercialization of Christmas, which they feel overshadows our rich cultural heritage and the religious significance of the season.

A Mexican adult participating in a Posada procession, carrying a candle and singing carols, with children dressed as Mary and Joseph.

Germany



In Germany, Advent is a cherished time of preparation and anticipation. We light candles on the Advent wreath every Sunday, and children eagerly open a door on their Advent calendars each day leading up to Christmas. On December 6th, we celebrate Nikolaus, where St. Nicholas leaves sweets and small gifts in children's boots if they've been good. I remember the joy of finding treats in my boot as a child. Over time, some traditions have become more commercialized, with a greater focus on gift-giving and elaborate decorations. This has drawn criticism from those who feel that the true spirit of Advent, a time of reflection and religious preparation, is being lost.

A German adult lighting candles on an Advent wreath, surrounded by family in a warmly decorated home with an Advent calendar hanging on the wall.

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Name:

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Describe the role of the Yule Lads in Icelandic Advent celebrations.

Explain the criticism surrounding the commercialization of Christmas traditions in Germany.

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The interview

Now read an interview with a cultural scientist and learn more about the development of Advent traditions.

Jason Smith: Good afternoon, Dr. Harper-Wilson. Thank you for joining us today to discuss Advent traditions worldwide. Could you start by telling us about some of the differences in Advent traditions around the globe?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: Good afternoon, Jason. It's a pleasure to be here. Advent traditions indeed vary widely across different cultures. In some countries, Advent is marked by the use of Advent calendars, with each day leading up to Christmas revealing a small gift or a piece of chocolate. This is quite popular in countries like Germany and the UK. In contrast, in Scandinavian countries like Sweden, the celebration of Saint Lucia on December 13th is a significant part of the Advent season. Young girls dress in white gowns with wreaths of candles on their heads, singing songs to bring light during the dark winter days.

Jason Smith: That sounds fascinating! How have these traditions developed over time?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: The development of Advent traditions is deeply rooted in history and cultural exchanges. Originally, Advent was a period of fasting and spiritual preparation for Christmas, similar to Lent before Easter. Over time, as societies evolved, these practices adapted to local customs and climates. For example, the Advent wreath, which originated in Germany, has been adopted in various forms around the world. It's interesting to see how a simple tradition of lighting candles to represent the four weeks before Christmas has been embraced globally, each culture adding its unique touch.

Jason Smith: Are there any modern developments in Advent traditions that you find particularly interesting or problematic?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: One significant modern development is the commercialization of Advent. While traditional Advent calendars with religious themes still exist, many contemporary versions are focused on consumerism, offering everything from luxury beauty products to gourmet foods. This shift can overshadow the original intent of Advent as a time for reflection and spiritual preparation. Another interesting development is the rise of digital Advent calendars, which can be a fun way to engage with the tradition in today's tech-savvy world, but they also raise concerns about screen time and the potential loss of tactile, hands-on experiences that traditional calendars offer.

Jason Smith: That's a good point. Could you elaborate on the potential problems associated with these developments?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: Absolutely. The commercialization of Advent can lead to a focus on materialism rather than the spiritual and communal aspects of the season. This shift might dilute the cultural and religious significance of Advent, turning it into just another marketing opportunity. Additionally, the pressure to buy expensive Advent calendars or gifts can create financial stress, especially in households with limited resources. As for digital Advent calendars, while they can be engaging, they might contribute to the already high levels of screen time among young people, potentially affecting their physical and

mental health. It's crucial to find a balance and ensure that the essence of Advent is not lost in the process.

Jason Smith: Those are very valid concerns. How do you think we can address these issues while still embracing new traditions?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: I believe it's essential to be mindful and intentional about how we celebrate Advent. Educating young people about the origins and meanings of these traditions can help preserve their significance. Encouraging activities that promote togetherness and reflection, such as making homemade Advent calendars or participating in community events, can also be beneficial. It's about finding ways to integrate new traditions without losing sight of the values and messages that Advent is meant to convey.

Jason Smith: Thank you, Dr. Harper-Wilson. This has been an enlightening discussion. Any final thoughts you'd like to share with our readers?

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: Just a reminder that Advent is a time for anticipation and preparation, not just for Christmas but for the values of love, peace, and hope that it represents. Embracing both traditional and modern practices thoughtfully can make the season meaningful and enriching for everyone.

Jason Smith: Thank you for your time, Dr. Harper-Wilson. Have a wonderful Advent season!

Dr. Emily Harper-Wilson: Thank you, Jason. You too!

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Explain how Advent traditions have evolved over time and the factors that influenced these changes.

Describe the modern developments in Advent traditions and the potential problems they pose.
