Santa Claus

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Santa Claus, or **Santa**, is a figure in North American culture with legendary, mythological and folkloric aspects, which reflect an amalgamation of the Dutch Sinterklaas,[1] the English Father Christmas, and Christmas gift-bringers in other traditions. Santa Claus is said to bring gifts to the homes of good children during the late evening and overnight hours of Christmas Eve, December 24.[2] Santa Claus in this contemporary understanding echoes aspects of hagiographical tales concerning the historical figure of gift-giver Saint Nicholas, the man from whom the name of *Santa Claus* derives and in whose honor Santa Claus may be referred to as **Saint Nicholas** or **Saint Nick**.

Santa Claus is generally depicted as a plump, jolly, white-bearded man wearing a red coat with white collar and cuffs, white-cuffed red trousers, and black leather belt and boots (images of him rarely have a beard with no moustache). This image became popular in the United States and Canada in the 19th century due to the significant influence of caricaturist and political cartoonist Thomas Nast.[3][4][5] This image has been maintained and reinforced through song, radio, television, children's books and films. The North American depiction of Santa Claus as it developed in the 19th and 20th century in turn influenced the modern perceptions of Father Christmas, Sinterklaas and Saint Nicholas in European culture.

According to a tradition which can be traced to the 1820s, Santa Claus lives at the North Pole, with a large number of magical elves, and nine (originally eight) flying reindeer. Since the 20th century, in an idea popularized by the 1934 song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town", Santa Claus has been believed to make a list of children throughout the world, categorizing them according to their behavior ("naughty" or "nice") and to deliver presents, including toys, and candy to all of the good boys and girls in the world, and sometimes coal to the naughty children, on the single night of Christmas Eve. He accomplishes this feat with the aid of the elves who make the toys in the workshop and the reindeer who pull his sleigh.[6][7]



1881 illustration by Thomas Nast who, with Clement Clarke Moore, helped to create the modern image of Santa Claus



The modern portrayal of Santa Claus frequently depicts him listening to the Christmas wishes of young children.

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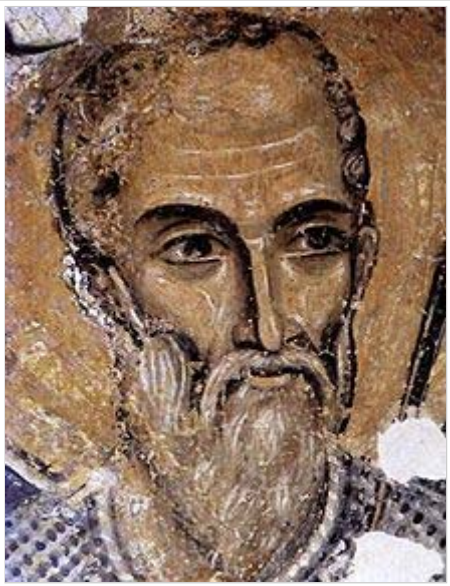
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Predecessor figures

Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas of Myra is the primary inspiration for the Christian figure of Sinterklaas. He was a 4th century Greek Christian bishop of Myra (now Demre) in Lycia, a province of the Byzantine Anatolia, now in Turkey. Nicholas was famous for his generous gifts to the poor, in particular presenting the three impoverished daughters of a pious Christian with dowries so that they would not have to become prostitutes.[8] He was very religious from an early age and devoted his life entirely to Christianity. In Europe (more precisely the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Germany) he is still portrayed as a bearded bishop in canonical robes. In 1087, the Italian city of Bari, wanting to enter the profitable pilgrimage industry of the times, mounted an expedition to locate the tomb of the Christian Saint and procure his remains. The reliquary of St. Nicholas was desecrated by Italian sailors and the spoils, including his relics, taken to Bari[9][10] where they are kept to this day. A basilica was constructed the same year to store the loot and the area became a pilgrimage site for the devout, thus justifying the economic cost of the expedition. Saint Nicholas was later claimed as a patron saint of many diverse groups, from archers, sailors, and children to pawnbrokers.[8][11] He is also the patron saint of both Amsterdam and Moscow.[12]



A medieval fresco depicting St Nicholas from the Boyana Church, near Sofia, Bulgaria

Influence of Germanic paganism and folklore


An 1886 depiction of the indigenous Norse God Odin by Georg von Rosen

Numerous parallels have been drawn between Santa Claus and the figure of Odin, a major god amongst the Germanic peoples prior to their Christianization. Since many of these elements are unrelated to Christianity, there are theories regarding the pagan origins of various customs of the holiday stemming from areas where the Germanic peoples were Christianized and retained elements of their indigenous traditions, surviving in various forms into modern depictions of Santa Claus.[13]

Odin was sometimes recorded, at the native Germanic holiday of Yule, as leading a great hunting party through the sky.[14] Two books from Iceland, the Poetic Edda, compiled in the 13th century from earlier sources, and the Prose Edda, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, describe Odin as riding an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir that could leap great distances, giving rise to comparisons to Santa Claus's reindeer.[15] Further, Odin was referred to by many names in Skaldic poetry, some of which describe his appearance or functions. These include *Síðgrani*,[16] *Síðskeggr*,[17] *Langbarðr*,[18] (all meaning "long beard") and *Jólnir*[19] ("Yule figure").

According to some traditions, children would place their boots, filled with carrots, straw, or sugar, near the chimney for Odin's flying horse, Sleipnir, to eat.[*citation needed*] Odin would then reward those children for their kindness by replacing Sleipnir's food with gifts or candy. This practice still survives in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands and became associated with Saint Nicholas since Christianization. In other countries it has been replaced by the hanging of stockings at the chimney in homes.[*citation needed*]

Originating from pre-Christian Alpine traditions and influenced by later Christianization, the Krampus is represented as a Companion of Saint Nicholas. Traditionally, some young men dress up as the Krampus in the first two weeks of December and particularly on the evening of December 5 and roam the streets frightening children (and adults) with rusty chains and bells.

Dutch folklore

Further information: Sinterklaas and Saint Nicholas

In the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, Saint Nicolas, ("Sinterklaas", often called "De Goede Sint" — "The Good Saint") is aided by helpers commonly known as Zwarte Piet in Dutch ("Black Peter") or "Père Fouettard" in French. His feast on December 6 came to be celebrated in many countries with the giving of gifts. However, in the Netherlands the Dutch celebrate on the evening of December 5, with a celebration called "pakjesavond". In the Reformation in 16th-17th century Europe, many Protestants and others changed the gift bringer to the Christ Child or *Christkindl*, and the date for giving gifts changed from December 6 to Christmas Eve.[20]

Tradition holds that Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas) and his aides arrive each year by steam boat from Spain in mid November carrying a book that contains notes on all children that indicate whether the child has been good or naughty during the year and gifts, chocolate letters and spice nuts to be handed to the well-behaved children. During the subsequent three weeks, Saint Nicholas is believed to ride a white-grey horse over the rooftops at night, delivering gifts through the chimney to the well-behaved children, while the naughty children risk being caught by Saint Nicholas' aides that carry jute bags and willow canes for that purpose.[21]

In contrast to Santa Claus, Sinterklaas is an elderly, stately and serious man with white hair and a long, full

beard. He wears a long red cape or chasuble over a traditional white bishop's alb and sometimes red stola, dons a red mitre, and holds a gold-coloured crosier, a long ceremonial shepherd's staff with a fancy curled top. He carries a big book that tells whether each individual child has been good or naughty in the past year. He traditionally rides a white gray. In Netherlands and Belgium the character of Santa Claus, is known as *de Kerstman* in Dutch ("the Christmas man") and *Père Noël* ("Father Christmas") in French. Although for kids Sinterklaas is the predominant gift-giver in the Netherlands in December (36% of the population only give presents on Sinterklaas day), Christmas is used by another fifth of the Dutch population to give presents. (21% give presents on Christmas only). Some 26% of the Dutch population give presents on both days.[22] In Belgium, presents are given to children only, but to almost all of them, on Sinterklaas day. On Christmas Day, everybody receives presents, but often without Santa Claus' help.



Sinterklaas in 2007

Scandinavian folklore

In the 1840s, an elf in Nordic folklore called "Tomte" or "Nisse" started to deliver the Christmas presents in Denmark. The Tomte was portrayed as a short, bearded man dressed in gray clothes and a red hat. This new version of the age-old folkloric creature was obviously inspired by the Santa Claus traditions that were now spreading to Scandinavia. By the end of the 19th century this tradition had also spread to Norway and Sweden, replacing the Yule Goat. The same thing happened in Finland, but there the more human figure retained the Yule Goat name. But even though the tradition of the Yule Goat as a bringer of presents is now all but extinct, a straw goat is still a common Christmas decoration in all of Scandinavia.

Father Christmas



Folk tale depiction of Father Christmas riding on a goat

Main article: Father Christmas

Father Christmas dates back at least as far as the 17th century in Britain, and pictures of him survive from that era, portraying him as a jolly well-nourished bearded man dressed in a long, green, fur-lined robe.[*citation needed*] He typified the spirit of good cheer at Christmas, and was reflected as the "Ghost of Christmas Present", in Charles Dickens's festive classic *A Christmas Carol*, a great genial man in a green coat lined with fur who takes Scrooge through the bustling streets of London on the current Christmas morning, sprinkling the essence of Christmas onto the happy populace. [*citation needed*]

History

Origins

Pre-modern representations of the gift-giver from church history and folklore, notably *St Nicholas* and *Sinterklaas*, merged with the British character *Father Christmas* to create the character known to Britons and Americans as *Santa Claus*.

In the British colonies of North America and later the United States, British and Dutch versions of the

gift-giver merged further. For example, in Washington Irving's *History of New York*, (1809), Sinterklaas was Americanized into "Santa Claus" (a name first used in the American press in 1773)[23] but lost his bishop's apparel, and was at first pictured as a thick-bellied Dutch sailor with a pipe in a green winter coat. Irving's book was a lampoon of the Dutch culture of New York, and much of this portrait is his joking invention.



"Scrooge's second Visitor", a colorized version of the original illustration by John Leech made for the Charles Dickens's festive classic *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

19th century

"December 24, 1864. This has usually been a very busy day with me, preparing for Christmas not only for my own tables, but for gifts for my servants. Now how changed! No confectionary, cakes, or pies can I have. We are all sad; no loud, jovial laugh from our boys is heard. Christmas Eve, which has ever been gaily celebrated here, which has witnessed the popping of firecrackers … and the hanging up of stockings, is an occasion now of sadness and gloom. I have nothing even to put in [8-yr-old daughter] Sadai's stocking, which hangs so invitingly for **Santa Claus**. How disappointed she will be in the morning, though I have explained to her why he cannot come. Poor children! Why must the innocent suffer with the guilty?"

Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, a Maine native, widow of Thomas Burge, and resident living ca. 40 miles southeast of Atlanta near Covington, Georgia. This entry from Mrs. Burge's diary was five weeks after most of General T. Sherman's U.S. Army forces had passed on their blackened-earth "march across Georgia" toward Savanna, after the army's destruction of Atlanta in mid-November, 1864. U.S. Army mop-up companies and stragglers during those intervening weeks continued to "forage", loot, burn, and abduct ex-slaves reluctant to leave

In 1821, the book *A New-year's present, to the little ones from five to twelve* is published in New York. It contains *Old Santeclaus*, an anonymous poem describing an old man on a reindeer sleigh, bringing presents to children.[25] Some modern ideas of Santa Claus seemingly became canon after the publication of the poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" (better known today as "The Night Before Christmas") in the Troy, New York, *Sentinel* on December 23, 1823 anonymously; the poem was later attributed to Clement Clarke Moore.[8] Many of his modern attributes are established in this poem, such as riding in a sleigh that lands on the roof, entering through the chimney, and having a bag full of toys. St. Nick is described as being "chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf" with "a little round belly", that "shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly", in spite of which the "miniature sleigh" and "tiny reindeer" still indicate that he is physically diminutive. The reindeer were also named: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Dunder and Blixem (Dunder and Blixem came from the old Dutch words for thunder and lightning, which were later changed to the more German sounding Donner and Blitzen).[26]

As years pass, Santa Claus evolves in popular culture into a large, heavyset person. One of the first artists to define Santa Claus's modern image was Thomas Nast, an American cartoonist of the 19th century. In 1863, a picture of Santa illustrated by Nast appeared in *Harper's Weekly*.

The story that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole may also have been a Nast creation. His Christmas image in the *Harper's* issue dated December 29, 1866 was a collage of engravings titled *Santa Claus and His Works*, which included the caption "Santa Claussville, N.P."[27] A color collection of Nast's pictures, published in 1869, had a poem also titled "Santa Claus and His Works" by George P. Webster, who wrote that Santa Claus's home was "near the North Pole, in the ice and snow".[28] The tale had become well known by the 1870s. A boy from Colorado writing to the children's magazine *The Nursery* in late 1874 said, "If we didn't live so very far from the North Pole, I should ask Santa Claus to bring me a donkey."[29]

The idea of a wife for Santa Claus may have been the creation of American authors, beginning in the mid-1800s. In 1889, the poet Katherine Lee Bates

their families and friends, hence, the concern of Mrs. Burge and her household.[24]

popularized Mrs. Claus in the poem "Goody Santa Claus on a Sleigh Ride".



Thomas Nast immortalized Santa Claus with an illustration for the January 3, 1863 issue of *Harper's Weekly*.

"Is There a Santa Claus?" was the title of an editorial appearing in the September 21, 1897 edition of the *New York Sun*. The editorial, which included the famous reply Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, has become an indelible part of popular Christmas lore in the United States and Canada.

20th century

L. Frank Baum's *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, a 1902 children's book, further popularized Santa Claus. Much of Santa Claus's mythos was not set in stone at the time, leaving Baum to give his "Neclaus" (Necile's Little One) a wide variety of immortal support, a home in the Laughing Valley of Hohaho, and *ten* reindeer—who could not fly, but leapt in enormous, flight-like bounds. Claus's immortality was earned, much like his title ("Santa"), decided by a vote of those naturally immortal. This work also established Claus's motives: a happy childhood among immortals. When Ak, Master Woodsman of the World, exposes him to the misery and poverty of children in the outside world, Santa strives to find a way to bring joy into the lives of all children, and eventually invents toys as a principal means.


Hanging up stockings for Santa Claus, Ohio, 1928

Images of Santa Claus were further popularized through Haddon Sundblom's depiction of him for The Coca-Cola Company's Christmas advertising in the 1930s.[8] The popularity of the image spawned urban legends that Santa Claus was invented by The Coca-Cola Company or that Santa wears red and white because they are the colors used to promote the Coca-Cola brand.[30] Historically, Coca-Cola was not the first soft drink company to utilize the modern image of Santa Claus in its advertising – White Rock Beverages had already used a red and white Santa to sell mineral water in 1915 and then in advertisements for its ginger ale in 1923.[31][32][33] In fact, Santa Claus had already appeared in red and white on the cover of *Puck* magazine at the start of the century.[34]


A man dressed up as Santa Claus fundraising for Volunteers of America on the sidewalk of street in Chicago,

The image of Santa Claus as a benevolent character became reinforced with its association with charity and philanthropy, particularly by organizations such as the Salvation Army. Volunteers dressed as Santa Claus typically became part of fundraising drives to aid needy families at Christmas time.

In some images from the early 20th century, Santa was depicted as personally making his toys by hand in a small workshop like a craftsman. Eventually, the idea emerged that he had numerous elves responsible for making the toys, but the toys were still handmade by each individual elf working in the traditional manner.

The 1956 popular song by George Melachrino, "Mrs. Santa Claus",

Illinois, in 1902. He is wearing a mask with a beard attached.

and the 1963 children's book *How Mrs. Santa Claus Saved Christmas*, by Phyllis McGinley, helped standardize and establish the character and role of Mrs. Claus in the popular imagination.

Seabury Quinn's 1948 novel *Roads* draws from historical legends to tell the story of Santa and the origins of Christmas. Other modern additions to the "story" of Santa include Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, the 9th and lead reindeer immortalized in a Gene Autry song, written by a Montgomery Ward copywriter.

Chimney tradition

The tradition of Santa Claus entering dwellings through the chimney may reach back to the tale of Saint Nicholas tossing coins through a window, and, in a later version of the tale, tossing coins down a chimney when he finds the window locked. In Dutch artist Jan Steen's painting, *The Feast of Saint Nicholas*, adults and toddlers are glancing up a chimney with amazement on their faces while other children play with their toys. The hearth was held sacred in primitive belief as a source of beneficence, and popular belief had elves and fairies bringing gifts to the house through this portal. Santa's entrance into homes on Christmas Eve via the chimney was made part of American tradition through Moore's *A Visit from Saint Nicholas* where the author described him as an elf.[35]



Steen's *The Feast of Saint Nicholas*

In popular culture

Further information: Santa Claus in Northern American culture

See also: SantaCon

By the end of the 20th century, the reality of mass mechanized production became more fully accepted by the Western public.[*citation needed*] That shift was reflected in the modern depiction of Santa's residence—now often humorously portrayed as a fully mechanized production and distribution facility, equipped with the latest manufacturing technology, and overseen by the elves with Santa and Mrs. Claus as executives and/or managers.[36] An excerpt from a 2004 article, from a supply chain managers' trade magazine, aptly illustrates this depiction:

> Santa's main distribution center is a sight to behold. At 4,000,000 square feet (370,000 m^2), it's one of the world's largest facilities. A real-time warehouse management system (WMS) is of course required to run such a complex. The facility makes extensive use of task interleaving, literally combining dozens of DC activities (putaway, replenishing, order picking, sleigh loading, cycle counting) in a dynamic queue...the DC elves have been on engineered standards and incentives for three years, leading to a 12% gain in productivity...The WMS and transportation system are fully integrated, allowing (the elves) to make optimal decisions that balance transportation and order picking and other DC costs. Unbeknownst to many, Santa actually has to use many sleighs and fake Santa drivers to get the job done Christmas Eve, and the transportation management system (TMS) optimally builds thousands of consolidated sacks that maximize cube utilization and minimize total air miles.[37]

Many television commercials, comic strips and other media depict this as a sort of humorous business, with Santa's elves acting as a sometimes mischievously disgruntled workforce, cracking jokes and pulling pranks on their boss. For instance, a *Bloom County* story from December 15, 1981 through December 24, 1981 has Santa rejecting the demands of PETCO (Professional Elves Toy-Making and Craft Organization) for higher wages, a hot tub in the locker room, and "short broads," with the elves then going on strike. President Reagan steps in, fires all of Santa's helpers, and replaces them with out-of-work air traffic controllers (an

obvious reference to the 1981 air traffic controllers' strike).[38] In *The Sopranos* episode, "...To Save Us All from Satan's Power", Paulie Gualtieri says he "Used to think Santa and Mrs. Claus were running a sweatshop over there. [...] The original elves were ugly, traveled with Santa to throw bad kids a beatin', and gave the good ones toys."

In Kyrgyzstan, a mountain peak was named after Santa Claus, after a Swedish company had suggested the location be a more efficient starting place for present-delivering journeys all over the world, than Lapland. In the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, a Santa Claus Festival was held on December 30, 2007, with government officials attending. 2008 was officially declared the Year of Santa Claus in the country. The events are seen as moves to boost tourism in Kyrgyzstan,[39] which is predominantly Muslim.

The Guinness World Record for the largest gathering of Santa Clauses is held by Derry City, Northern Ireland. On September 9, 2007. A total of 12,965 people dressed up as Santa or Santa's helper brought down the previous record of 3,921, which was set during the Santa Dash event in Liverpool City Centre in 2005.[40] A gathering of Santas in 2009 in Bucharest, Romania attempted top the world record, but failed with only 3939 Santas.[41]

Traditions and rituals

The North American traditions associated with Santa Claus are derived from a number of Christmas traditions from various countries. Some rituals (such as visiting a department store Santa) occur in the weeks and days before Christmas while others, such as preparing snacks for Santa, are specific to Christmas Eve. Some rituals, such as setting out stockings to be filled with gifts, are age-old traditions while others, such as NORAD's tracking of Santa's sleigh through the night skies on Christmas Eve, are modern inventions.

Parades, department stores, and shopping malls

Santa Claus appears in the weeks before Christmas in department stores or shopping malls, or at parties. The practice of this has been credited to James Edgar, as he started doing this in 1890 in his Brockton, Massachusetts department store.[42] He is played by an actor, usually helped by other actors (often mall employees) dressed as elves or other creatures of folklore associated with Santa. Santa's function is either to promote the store's image by distributing small gifts to children, or to provide a seasonal experience to children by listening to their wishlist while having them sit on his knee (a practice now under review by some organisations in Britain,[43] and Switzerland[44]). Sometimes a photograph of the child and Santa are taken. Having a Santa set up to take pictures with children is a ritual that dates back at least to 1918.[45]



Eaton's Santa Claus Parade, 1918, Toronto, Canada. Having arrived at the Eaton's department store, Santa is readying his ladder to climb up onto the building.

The area set up for this purpose is festively decorated, usually with a large throne, and is called variously "Santa's Grotto", "Santa's Workshop" or a similar term. In the United States, the most notable of these is the Santa at the flagship Macy's store in New York City - he arrives at the store by sleigh in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on the last float, and his court takes over a large portion of one floor in the store. The Macy's Santa Claus is often said to be the real Santa. Essayist David Sedaris is known for the satirical SantaLand Diaries he kept while working as an elf in the Macy's display, which were turned into a famous radio segment and later published.

Quite often the Santa, if and when he is detected to be fake, explains that he is not the real Santa and is helping him at this time of year. Most young children seem to understand this, as the real Santa is extremely busy around Christmas. At family parties, Santa is

sometimes impersonated by the male head of the household or other adult male family member.

There are schools offering instruction on how to act as Santa Claus. For example, children's television producer Jonathan Meath studied at the International School of Santa Claus and earned the degree *Master of Santa Claus* in 2006. It blossomed into a second career for him, and after appearing in parades and malls,[46] he appeared on the cover of the American monthly *Boston Magazine* as Santa.[47] There are associations with members who portray Santa; for example, Mr. Meath is a board member of the international organization called *Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas*.[48]



Santa Claus portrayed by children's television producer Jonathan Meath

Letter writing to Santa

Writing letters to Santa Claus has been a Christmas tradition for children for many years. These letters normally contain a wishlist of toys and assertions of good behavior. Some social scientists have found that boys and girls write different types of letters. Girls generally write longer but more polite lists and express the nature of Christmas more in their letters than in letters written by boys. Girls also more often request gifts for other people.[49]

Many postal services allow children to send letters to Santa Claus. These letters may be answered by postal workers and/or outside volunteers.[50] Writing letters to Santa Claus has the educational benefits of promoting literacy, computer literacy, and e-mail literacy. A letter to Santa is often a child's first experience of correspondence. Written and sent with the help of a parent or teacher, children learn about the structure of a letter, salutations, and the use of an address and postcode.[51]

According to the Universal Postal Union (UPU)'s 2007 study and survey of national postal operations, the United States Postal Service (USPS) has the oldest Santa letter answering effort by a national postal system. The USPS Santa letter answering effort started in 1912 and since 1940 has been called "Operation Santa (http://www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/2009/holiday/santa.htm) " to ensure that letters to Santa are adopted by charitable organizations, major corporations, local businesses and individuals in order to make children's holiday dreams come true from coast to coast.[50] Those seeking a North Pole holiday postmark through the USPS, are told to send their letter from Santa or a holiday greeting card by December 10 to: North Pole Holiday Postmark, Postmaster, 4141 Postmark Dr, Anchorage, AK 99530-9998.[52]

In 2006, according to the UPU's 2007 study and survey of national postal operations, France's Postal Service received the most letters for Santa Claus or "Père Noël" with 1,220,000 letters received from 126 countries.[53] France's Postal Service in 2007 specially recruited someone to answer the enormous volume of mail that was coming from Russia for Santa Claus.[50]

Other interesting Santa letter processing information, according to the UPU's 2007 study and survey of national postal operations, are:[50]

- Countries whose national postal operators answer letters to Santa and other end-of-year holiday figures, and the number of letters received in 2006: Germany (500,000), Australia (117,000), Austria (6,000), Bulgaria (500), Canada (1,060,000), Spain (232,000), United States (no figure, as statistics are not kept centrally), Finland (750,000), France (1,220,000), Great Britain (750,000), Ireland (100,000), New Zealand (110,000), Portugal (255,000), Poland (3,000), Slovakia (85,000), Sweden (150,000), Switzerland (17,863), Ukraine (5,019).

- In 2006, Finland's national postal operation received letters from 150 countries (representing 90% of the letters received), France's Postal Service from 126 countries, Germany from 80 countries, and Slovakia from 20 countries.
- In 2007, Canada Post replied to letters in 26 languages and Deutsche Post in 16 languages.
- Some national postal operators make it possible to send in e-mail messages which are answered by physical mail. All the same, Santa still receives far more letters than e-mail through the national postal operators, proving that children still write letters. National postal operators offering the ability to use an on-line web form (with or without a return e-mail address) to Santa and obtain a reply include Canada Post [54] (on-line web request form in English and French), France's Postal Service (on-line web request form in French),[55][56] and New Zealand Post [57] (on-line web request form in English).[58] In France, by 6 December 2010, a team of 60 postal elves had sent out reply cards in response to 80,000 e-mail on-line request forms and more tna 500,000 physical letters.[51]

Canada Post has a special postal code for letters to Santa Claus, and since 1982 over 13,000 Canadian postal workers have volunteered to write responses. His address is: Santa Claus, North Pole, Canada, H0H 0H0 [59] (see also: Ho ho ho). (This postal code, in which zeroes are used for the letter "O" is consistent with the alternating letter-number format of all Canadian postal codes.) Sometimes children's charities answer letters in poor communities, or from children's hospitals, and give them presents they would not otherwise receive. In 2009, 1,000 workers answered 1.1 million letters and 39,500 e-mail on-line request forms from children in 30 different languages, including Braille.[51]

In Britain it was traditional for some to burn the Christmas letters on the fire so that they would be magically transported by the wind to the North Pole. However this has been found to be less efficient than the use of the normal postal service, and this tradition is dying out in modern times, especially with few homes having open fires in their homes.[60] Recently the national postal service Royal Mail has extended its delivery service to include Santa Claus' address, and allocated it a postcode. In 2010 the full address is: Santa Claus, Reindeer Land, SAN TA1.[61]

In Mexico and other Latin American countries, besides using the mail, sometimes children wrap their letters to a small helium balloon, releasing them into the air so Santa magically receives them.[60]

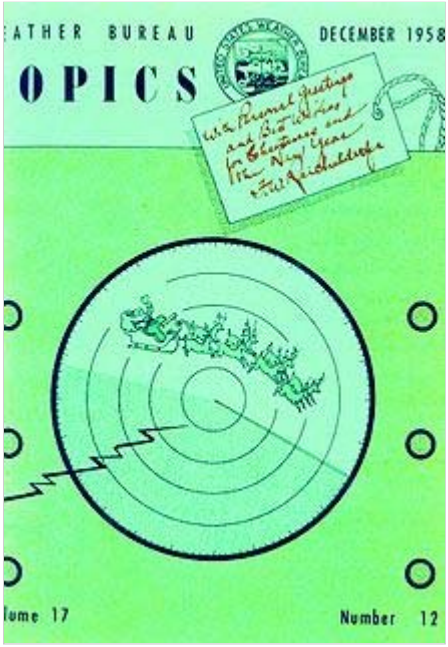
In 2010, the Brazilian National Post Service, “Correios” formed partnerships with public schools and social institutions to encourage children to write letters and make use of postcodes and stamps. In 2009, the Brazilian National Post Service, “Correios” answered almost two million children's letters, and spread some seasonal cheer by donating 414,000 Christmas gifts to some of Brazil's neediest citizens.[51]

Through the years, the Finnish Santa Claus (Joulupukki or "Yule Goat") has received over eight million letters. He receives over 600,000 letters every year from over 198 different countries with Togo being the most recent country added to the list.[51] Children from Great Britain, Poland and Japan are the busiest writers. The Finnish Santa Claus lives in Korvatunturi, however the Santa Claus Main Post Office is situated in Rovaniemi near the Arctic circle. His address is: Santa Claus’ Main Post Office, Santa’s Workshop Village, FIN-96930 Arctic Circle. The post office welcomes 300,000 visitor a year, with 70,000 visitors in December alone.[51]

Children can also receive a letter from Santa through a variety of private agencies and organizations, and on occasion public and private cooperative ventures. An example of a public and private cooperative venture is the opportunity for expatriate and local children and parents to receive postmarked mail and greeting cards from Santa during December in Beijing, People's Republic of China under the auspices of the China Trade Commission,[62] the Finnish Embassy in Beijing,[63] Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi, Finland, and the

People's Republic of China Postal System's Beijing International Post Office.[64][65] [66][67] Parents can order a personalized "Santa letter" to be sent to their child, often with a North Pole postmark. The "Santa Letter" market generally relies on the internet as a medium for ordering such letters rather than retail stores.

Santa tracking, Santa websites and e-mail to and from Santa



The Christmas issue of NOAA's *Weather Bureau Topics* with "Santa Claus" streaking across a weather radar screen, 1958

Over the years there have been a number of websites created by various organizations that have purported to track Santa Claus. Some, such as NORAD Tracks Santa, the Airservices Australia Tracks Santa Project,[68][69][70] the Santa Update Project, and the MSNBC and Bing Maps Platform Tracks Santa Project [71][72] have endured. Others, such as the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport's Tracks Santa Project,[73][74][75] the Santa Retro Radar – Lehigh Valley Project,[76] and the NASA Tracks Santa Project,[77] have fallen by the wayside.

In 1955, a Sears Roebuck store in Colorado Springs, Colorado, gave children a number to call a "Santa hotline". The number was mistyped and children called the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) on Christmas Eve instead. The Director of Operations, Colonel Harry Shoup, received the first call for Santa and responded by telling children that there were signs on the radar that Santa was indeed heading south from the North Pole. A tradition began which continued under the name NORAD Tracks Santa when in 1958 Canada and the United States jointly created the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD).[78] This tracking can now be done via the Internet and NORAD's website.



1955 Sears ad with the misprinted telephone number that led to the NORAD Tracks Santa program.

In the past, many local television stations in the United States and Canada likewise "tracked Santa Claus" in their own metropolitan areas through the stations' meteorologists. In December 2000, the Weather Channel built upon these local efforts to provide a national Christmas Eve "Santa tracking" effort, called "SantaWatch" in cooperation with NASA, the International Space Station, and Silicon Valley-based new multimedia firm Dreamtime Holdings.[79] In the 21st century, most local television stations in the United States and Canada rely upon outside established "Santa tracking" efforts, such as NORAD Tracks Santa.[80]

Many other websites are available year-round that are devoted to Santa Claus and purport to keep tabs on his activities in his workshop. Many of these websites also include e-mail addresses which allow children to send e-mail to Santa Claus. Most of these websites use volunteer living people as "elves" to answer e-mail sent to Santa. Some websites, such as Santa's page on Microsoft's Windows Live Spaces, however have used or still use "bots" to compose and send e-mail replies, with occasional unfortunate results.[81][82]

In addition to providing holiday-themed enetrtainment, "Santa tracking" websites inspire children around the world to think about how space technology and exploration play an increasingly important role in daily life,[83] teach them about geography.[84] and encourage them to take an interest in science.[85][86]

Christmas Eve rituals

In the United States and Canada, children traditionally leave Santa a glass of milk and a plate of cookies; in Britain and Australia, he is sometimes given sherry and mince pies instead. In Sweden, children leave rice porridge. In Ireland it is popular to give him Guinness or milk, along with Christmas pudding or mince pies.

In Hungary, St. Nicolaus (Mikulás) comes on the night of December 5 and the children get their gifts the next morning. They get sweets in a bag if they were good, and a golden colored birch switch if not. On Christmas Eve "Little Jesus" comes and gives gifts for everyone.

In Slovenia, Saint Nicholas (Miklavž) also brings small gifts for good children on the eve of December 6. Božiček (Christmas Man) brings gifts on the eve of December 25, and Dedek Mraz (Grandfather Frost) brings gifts in the evening of December 31 to be opened on New Years Day.

British, Australian, Irish, Canadian and American children also leave a carrot for Santa's reindeer, and were traditionally told that if they are not good all year round, that they will receive a lump of coal in their stockings, although this practice is now considered archaic. Children following the Dutch custom for *sinterklaas* will "put out their shoe" — that is, leave hay and a carrot for his horse in a shoe before going to bed—sometimes weeks before the *sinterklaas avond*. The next morning they will find the hay and carrot replaced by a gift; often, this is a marzipan figurine. Naughty children were once told that they would be left a *roe* (a bundle of sticks) instead of sweets, but this practice has been discontinued.

Other Christmas Eve Santa Claus rituals in the United States include reading Clement Clark Moore's *A Visit from St. Nicholas* or other tale about Santa Claus, watching a Santa or Christmas-related animated program on television (such as the aforementioned *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town* and similar specials, such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, among many others), and the singing of Santa Claus songs such as "Santa Claus is Coming to Town", "Here Comes Santa Claus", and "Up on the Housetop". Last minute rituals for children before going to bed include aligning stockings at the mantelpiece or other place where Santa cannot fail to see them, peeking up the chimney (in homes with a fireplace), glancing out a window and scanning the heavens for Santa's sleigh, and (in homes without a fireplace), unlocking an exterior door so Santa can easily enter the house. Tags on gifts for children are sometimes signed by their parents "From Santa Claus" before the gifts are laid beneath the tree.

Criticism

See also: Christmas controversy

Christian opposition

Despite Santa Claus's mixed Christian roots, he has become a secular representation of Christmas. As such, some Protestants dislike the secular focus on Santa Claus and the materialist focus that gift giving brings to the holiday. Such a condemnation of Christmas is not a 20th century phenomenon, but originated among some Protestant groups of the 16th century and was prevalent among the Puritans of 17th century England and colonial America who banned the holiday as either pagan or Roman Catholic. Christmas was made legal with the Restoration but the Puritan opposition to the holiday persisted in New England for almost two centuries.[87]

Following the Restoration of the monarchy and with Puritans out of power in England,[88] the ban on Christmas was satirized in works such as Josiah King's *The Examination and Tryal of Old Father Christmas; Together with his Clearing by the Jury* (1686) [Nissenbaum, chap. 1].

Rev. Paul Nedergaard, a clergyman in Copenhagen, Denmark, attracted controversy in 1958 when he declared Santa to be a "pagan goblin" after Santa's image was used on fund-raising materials for a Danish



Excerpt from Josiah King's *The Examination and Tryal of Father Christmas* (1686), published shortly after Christmas was reinstated as a holy day in England. *Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.*

welfare organization [Clar, 337]. One prominent religious group that refuses to celebrate Santa Claus, or Christmas itself, for similar reasons is the Jehovah's Witnesses.[89] A number of denominations of Christians have varying concerns about Santa Claus, which range from acceptance to denouncement.[90][91]

Some Christians prefer the holiday focus on the actual birth of Jesus, recognizing that Christmas stemmed from pagan festivals such as the Roman Saturnalia and Germanic Yule that were subsumed within ancient Christianity. An even smaller subset of Reformed Christians actually prefer the secularized version of the holiday for the same reasons, believing that to relegate Christ's birth to Christmas is wrong.[92]

Symbol of commercialism

In his book *Nicholas: The Epic Journey from Saint to Santa Claus*, writer Jeremy Seal describes how the commercialization of the Santa Claus figure began in the 19th century. "In the 1820s he began to acquire the recognizable trappings: reindeer, sleigh, bells," said Seal in an interview.[93] "They are simply the actual bearings in the world from which he emerged. At that time, sleighs were how you got about Manhattan."

Writing in *Mothering*, writer Carol Jean-Swanson makes similar points, noting that the original figure of St. Nicholas gave only to those who were needy and that today Santa Claus seems to be more about conspicuous consumption:

> “ Our jolly old Saint Nicholas reflects our culture to a T, for he is fanciful, exuberant, bountiful, over-weight, and highly commercial. He also mirrors some of our highest ideals: childhood purity and innocence, selfless giving, unfaltering love, justice, and mercy. (What child has ever received a coal for Christmas?) The problem is that, in the process, he has become burdened with some of society's greatest challenges: materialism, corporate greed, and domination by the media. Here, Santa carries more in his baggage than toys alone![94] ”

In the Czech Republic, a group of advertising professionals started a website against Santa Claus, a relatively recent phenomenon in that country.[95] "Czech Christmases are intimate and magical. All that Santa stuff seems to me like cheap show business," said David König of the Creative Copywriters Club, pointing out that it is primarily an American and British tradition. "I'm not against Santa himself. I'm against Santa in my country only." In the Czech tradition, presents are delivered by Ježíšek, which translates as Baby Jesus.

In the United Kingdom, Santa, or Father Christmas; was historically depicted wearing a green cloak. More recently, that has been changed to the more commonly known red suit.[96] One school in the seaside town of Brighton banned the use of a red suit erroneously believing it was only indicative of the Coca-Cola advertising campaign. School spokesman Sarah James said: "The red-suited Santa was created as a marketing tool by Coca-Cola, it is a symbol of commercialism."[97] In reality, the red-suited Santa was created by Thomas Nast[*citation needed*].

Controversy about deceiving children

> The adults they count on to provide reliable information about the world introduce them to Santa. Then his existence is affirmed by friends, books, TV and movies. It is also validated by hard evidence: the half-eaten cookies and empty milk glasses by the tree on Christmas morning. In other words, children do a great job of scientifically evaluating Santa. And adults do a great job of duping them.[98]

Woolley posits that it is perhaps "kinship with the adult world" that causes children not to be angry that they were lied to for so long.[98] The criticism about this deception is not that it is a simple lie, but a complicated series of very large lies.[99] The objections to the lie are that it is unethical for parents to lie to children without good cause, and that it discourages healthy skepticism in children.[99] With no greater good at the heart of the lie, it is charged that it is more about the parents than it is about the children. Writer Austin Cline posed the question: "Is it not possible that kids would find at least as much pleasure in knowing that parents are responsible for Christmas, not a supernatural stranger?"[99]

Others, however, see no harm in the belief in Santa Claus. Psychologist Tamar Murachver said that because it is a cultural, not parental, lie, it does not undermine parental trust.[100] The New Zealand Skeptics also see no harm in parents telling their children that Santa is real. Spokesperson Vicki Hyde said, "It would be a hard-hearted parent indeed who frowned upon the innocent joys of our children's cultural heritage. We save our bah humbugs for the things that exploit the vulnerable."[100] It can also be advocated that, although Santa Claus isn't real, the Christmas spirit is real.[101]

Dr. John Condry of Cornell University interviewed more than 500 children for a study of the issue and found that not a single child was angry at his or her parents for telling them Santa Claus was real. According to Dr. Condry, "The most common response to finding out the truth was that they felt older and more mature. They now knew something that the younger kids did not".[102]

The other side of the debate concludes with another referenced quote of:

> There are three stages of a man's life: He believes in Santa Claus, he doesn't believe in Santa Claus, he is Santa Claus. - Author Unknown [103][104]

A further advantage of the Santa Claus deception is that it has provided a useful model for explaining that other beliefs in the supernatural might be equally false; one should not blindly accept any belief.[105]

Home

Santa Claus's home traditionally includes a residence and a workshop where he creates - often with the aid of elves or other supernatural beings - the gifts he delivers to good children at Christmas. Some stories and legends include a village, inhabited by his helpers, surrounding his home and shop.



A restored traditional Greenlandic turf house on Uummannaq Island serving the children of Denmark as the 'Santa Claus Castle', where they can write letters

In North American tradition (in the United States and Canada), Santa lives on the North Pole, which according to Canada Post lies within Canadian jurisdiction in postal code H0H 0H0 (a reference to "ho ho ho", Santa's notable saying, although postal codes starting with H are usually reserved for the island of Montreal in Québec). On December 23, 2008, Jason Kenney, Canada's minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, formally awarded Canadian citizenship status to Santa Claus. "*The Government of Canada wishes Santa the very best in his Christmas Eve duties and wants to let him know that, as a Canadian*

citizen, he has the automatic right to re-enter Canada once his trip around the world is complete," Kenney said in an official statement.[106]

There is also a city named North Pole in Alaska where a tourist attraction known as the "Santa Claus House" has been established. The US postal service uses the city's zip code of 99705 as their advertised postal code for Santa Claus. A Wendy's in North Pole, AK has also claimed to have a "sleigh fly through".[107]

Each Nordic country claims Santa's residence to be within their territory. Norway claims he lives in Drøbak. In Denmark, he is said to live in Greenland (near Uummannaq). In Sweden, the town of Mora has a theme park named Tomteland. The national postal terminal in Tomteboda in Stockholm receives children's letters for Santa. In Finland, Korvatunturi in has long been known as Santa's home, and two theme parks, Santa Claus Village and Santa Park are located near Rovaniemi.



Santa Claus House signage in North Pole, Alaska


Santa Claus statue in Kerala, India

See also

Related topics

- Christmas controversy
- Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus
- Flying Santa - a northeastern US tradition of pilots delivering presents to families in remote lighthouses
- Santa Claus, Indiana - a small Midwestern United States town named after the figure, and home to Holiday World amusement park
- Easter Bunny

Related figures in folklore

- Mikulás (Hungary)
- Companions of Saint Nicholas
- Jack Frost and Old Man Winter - Mythical characters.
- Olentzero, Basque character, possibly derived from Roman traditions
- Saint Nicholas of Myra and Saint Basil
- Tomte - Scandinavian mythical character
- Yule Goat - Scandinavian Christmas symbol
- Yule Lads
- Ded Moroz (Father Frost, Russian: Дед Мороз) plays a role similar to Santa Claus

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An old-fashioned Santa suit

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External links

- North Pole Flooded With Letters - MSNBC (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16122221/)
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