

Christmas Around the World

Interpretive Panels for the annual exhibit at the
Museum of Science and Industry



BELGIUM

Joyeux Noel (French), Vrolijk Kerstfeest (Dutch), Frohe Weihnachten (German), Vrolike Kerstmis (Flemish)

Belgium is a land of many languages and customs. St. Nicholas visits Walloon-speaking Belgians twice. On December 4, he visits homes to determine if children have been good. On December 6, his birthday, he returns and gives gifts of sweets and toys to good children and twigs to those who have misbehaved. Francophones receive a visit from Pere Noel on December 6. Dutch-speaking Belgians are visited by St. Nicholas on December 6. Families enjoy baking (and eating!) speculoos (spiced cookies shaped like St. Nicholas) and buche de Noel (a yule log cake).



BELIZE

Feliz Navidad (Spanish), Kampliment a di seezn (Kriol)

Belize's rich cultural diversity translates into a mosaic of holiday celebrations. For the nine evenings of Las Posadas (celebrated by Mestizo culture), statues of Mary and Joseph are carried throughout the town, from home to home, accompanied by music, dance, fireworks and other festivities. In

Garifuna culture, the “Charikanari” dance interprets the relationship of a bull with a hunter with elaborate costume, fun and games. And Kriol (Creole) communities in Belize celebrate the Bram, a parade of dancing, singing and music-making throughout the countryside.



CZECH REPUBLIC

Vesele Vanoce

St. Nicholas Eve is celebrated December 5, when the saint, accompanied by a good and bad angel, visits children, bringing gifts to those who have behaved well. On Christmas Eve, families gather to enjoy a feast featuring baked carp and kuba (a barley, mushroom, onion casserole). Many Czechs fast the 24 hours before Christmas Eve. Those who abide by the fast may be lucky and witness a magical golden pig “dancing” on the wall!



ICELAND

Gleðileg jól

Thirteen days before Christmas, 13 troll-like, elfish pranksters (each with a different personality and prank) known as Yulemen descend upon Icelandic towns. In years past, these mischief-makers would steal and cause trouble, but today, they leave small gifts in the shoes of deserving children.



*INDIA

Shubh Naya Baras

India’s Christian community celebrates Christmas by attending Midnight Mass and decorating their homes with ornate nativity scenes, lights and clay lamps perched atop the roof. Many Indians also hang a star on the front of their house until January 6, Three Kings Day. Diwali is a holiday celebrated by Hindus across India. The five-day festival of lights honors the goddess Lakshmi. The date changes every year based on the lunar calendar: November 9 in 2007, October 28 in 2008.



ITALY

Buon Natale

La Befana is the female, Italian equivalent of Santa Claus. The elderly, witchlike woman flies above the country on broomstick, giving gifts to children on January 6 (Epiphany Day). Legend tells that La Befana declined an invitation from the Wise Men to join them in Bethlehem, and to this day and for all eternity, she continues to search for the baby Jesus.



*JAPAN

Merry Christmas (Christmas is imported from the West, so the English greeting was imported as well). Also, Christmas Omedet and Merii Kurisumasu

The majority of Japan's population is Buddhist, and Christmas is not a commonly celebrated holiday. However, younger generations do exchange gifts at Christmas. Shogatsu, New Year's Day, is Japan's primary winter holiday. On New Year's Eve, many Japanese visit their shrine or temple to pray for a healthy and prosperous new year. Joya-no-Kane is the midnight Buddhist chiming of the bells – 108 chimes signifying the 108 Earthly sins.



PUERTO RICO

Feliz Navidad

Christmas is celebrated in Puerto Rico, but the more popular holiday is January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, also known as Three Kings Day (Dia de Reyes). On the evening before, the Three Kings—Melchor, Gaspar and Baltazar—visit leaving gifts for Puerto Rican children. In anticipation, youngsters fill shoeboxes with grass to feed the Kings' camels.