

Holiday Traditions



Tips for Visiting Santa

Across the country, children wait in anticipation to meet up with the man in red at their local malls or event venue. The wholesome tradition is often captured in pictures and treasured throughout the years.

If the thought of long lines and large groups aren't your idea of a fun holiday tradition, consider arranging a visit in familiar surroundings. Try to find an appropriate costume long before the event arrives so you can adjust the Santa Claus suit to make sure it fits.

You can then invite friends with young children to come over and share the experience. This is an excellent way to introduce St. Nick to kiddos, who may be uncomfortable around unfamiliar people.



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SHARE THE HISTORY

If your child is hesitant about meeting Santa, you should familiarize them with his story through books and positive conversation. Share the history of the real man behind an iconic Christmas legend.

According to the St. Nicholas Center, that bishop became renowned for his

generosity to those in need, a love of children, and an avid concern for sailors and ships. Early historical data shows he was born around the year 280 in an area that is now Turkey. He lost his parents at a young age and used his bountiful inheritance to help poor people.

After he died in 343, his leg-

acy lived on in numerous countries where the feast day of St. Nicholas was celebrated Dec. 6. Children began leaving their shoes out the night before to discover gifts left inside after awakening the next morning.

WATCH FROM AFAR

As a child becomes accus-

tomed to the magic of St. Nick, it's beneficial to give them an idea of what to expect when meeting. Consider bringing your little ones to the venue where he will be visiting with children and watching from a distance. Once they see the shared joy from other kids in line, they can relax and they

will get excited.

SET THE EXAMPLE

If Santa allows it, show your children the encounter is safe by personally introducing your child. This will help them gain the courage and confidence to go over their wish list with a comforting demeanor.

Write a Christmas Story

A Christmas Eve tradition in many American households is reading holiday-themed storybooks. This year, create your own tale with the children in your life.

With their input, consider a plot, theme and list of characters who partake in an exciting adventure.

Do you need the inspiration to draft an engaging storyline? Check out these timeless Christmas classics that are a staple in multiple family traditions.

- “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” by Charles M. Schulz and Vicki Scott.
- “A Christmas Carol,” by Jennifer Adams and Alison Oliver.
- “Elf on the Shelf,” by Carol Aebersold and Chanda Bell.
- “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” by Dr. Seuss.
- “The Night Before Christmas,” by Charles Santore.

These stories are sure to get the creativity flowing and can help inspire your family to create a book that will make an appearance every year.

BRAINSTORM

You should begin your new story by thinking of a con-



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cept. Find ideas by asking your children for their favorite aspect of Christmas. Perhaps, it’s visiting Santa Claus with family, decorating the tree or finding gifts for loved ones to enjoy.

After getting a few ideas, write down a structure for the plot and a tentative ending. With the primary points outlined, jot down an exciting

outcome that ties the story together. To add personalization for your book, use the names of family members for the characters as well as inside jokes that your household will recognize.

PRODUCE

Once the story is finished, you should begin illustrating the pages. Invest in

high-quality coloring materials and pages. If you feel that your images don’t do the content justice, consider hiring a professional artist. Their unique imagery can take your words to the next level.

SHOULD YOU PUBLISH?

If you think your custom book would be a family favorite for others, consider pub-

lishing it and trying to sell it. Modern technology allows even amateur authors to get their creations to the public without backing them from a publisher.

When self-publishing, be sure to market the content to your friends and loved ones on social media and by sharing a link to the story in public forums.

Support a Giving Tree

It's common to find Christmas trees decorated with ornaments stating needs for your fellow community members.

Goods like new clothes, financial assistance for a family's holiday or even a hopeful child dreaming of a new toy are typically on tap. You can make a positive impact when supporting this wholesome cause.

If you're unsure how this type of charitable outreach works, be sure to check with the organization. Some may have different methods regarding how you send your gift. Whether you ship it directly to a recipient or drop it off with the charity, it's essential to make sure you follow the right rules.

FIND A GIVING TREE

You can use social media to your advantage when discovering giving tree charities. Ask your friends or family members for their experiences with similar organizations. Here are some familiar places to look in your own backyard.

- Churches.
- Public schools.
- Grocery stores.
- Shopping malls.
- Homeless shelters.
- Government buildings.
- Police or fire stations.

WHAT TO SEND

Typically, the wish you select will tell a story about a struggle the recipient is going through



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and how their chosen gift will impact their life. While you should always purchase what they ask for, consider being extra generous by exceeding their expectations.

For instance, if a child has a

wish for a simple clothing item, try to invest in a few different outfits and a new pair of shoes to add extra excitement on Christmas morning. Of course, you should keep your budget in mind to avoid a reliance on

credit cards throughout the season.

INVOLVE YOUR CHILDREN

Show your children the importance of generosity and helping others in need by

involving them with the giving tree adventure. They will learn a wholesome lesson of appreciation and receive a feeling of self-satisfaction when helping make someone's holiday more bountiful.

Reverse Advent Calendar

Most Americans are familiar with celebrating the upcoming Christmas season with an Advent calendar.

Adults and children count down the days with a creative calendar and are typically rewarded with a sweet snack or fun toy each morning. Have you considered reversing this action by celebrating each day by giving rather than receiving?

The purpose of a reverse Advent calendar is to donate an item every day and ultimately give them to someone in need. Things like food, household essentials and books are all great ideas.

Learn more about the holiday tradition that brings families together while supporting others without the supplies required for daily tasks.

FINDING GOODS IN YOUR HOME

If you have a pantry that is overdue for a cleanup, you probably have numerous food options that can be included with your donations. Look for non-perishable goods like canned fruits and vegetables or noodles that are far from the expiration date.

Create a safe place to collect the products throughout the month to make organization easier.

Inspire your children to get involved by asking them to go through their bedrooms to find



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unused toys or books that they can part with. Reading material can be donated to libraries or group homes where kids have few forms of entertainment.

SHOPPING FOR A CAUSE

While you plan your weekly shopping list, consider picking

up extra necessities like soaps, deodorant, feminine products, toothpaste and hair-care products. Take the time to clip coupons and check sale's ads from your local grocers to find money-saving ways to give. You may even find BOGO options for items you use so one can go

toward your donation box.

CHALLENGE YOUR FRIENDS

According to the organization Feed the Children, one in seven kids in the United States does not know where their next meal will come from. This

Christmas, motivate your friends and family to take on the reverse Advent calendar challenge with you. With enough people behind the movement, struggling families in your community can benefit with donations from multiple sources.

Create Ornaments as a Family

Do you need help getting into the holiday spirit? A festive evening crafting personalized ornaments with your loved ones can do the trick.

Consider visiting your local arts and crafts store to pick up some durable materials. Remember, these relics will decorate your Christmas tree each year, so try to use high-quality items.

If you have children, include them in the custom ornament builds. With this tradition, you will witness their creativity and crafting skills progress year after year. Store the decorations in sealed packaging to protect the paint or materials used for the creation. Once your little ones grow and begin having kids of their own, handing them down so they decorate their trees is a wholesome milestone.

Here are some fun ideas to get you started as you build a new holiday tradition.

COOKIE-CUTTER ORNAMENTS

Find brass or steel Christmas-themed cookie cutters at your local grocery store or hobby outlet. You will need a hot glue gun to adhere the materials to a high-quality paper. Choose an ornament backing that is festive for a holiday like one featuring



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trees or jingle bells.

Allow the cookie cutter to completely bond to the page before using a small blade to cut around the edges. You can then use acrylic paints or glitter to create an exciting design to display on the tree. Once the decorations are in place, make a loop out of ribbon or twine, then glue it on the

ornament's back to hang.

REDECORATE STORE-BOUGHT ORNAMENTS

Consider redesigning old store-bought ornaments you already own. Find materials like glitter, paint markers or stencils to customize the project and give old decorations a new life. Children can use les-

sons learned when creating Easter eggs by dipping frosted ornaments into cups of paint, crafts glue, water and gel food coloring. Simply drop the globes into the mixture to create attractive displays.

ELF DOOR

If the Elf on the Shelf visits your home each Christmas,

consider building an elf door ornament to act as its entry portal. Kids will enjoy the view of their stuffed buddy's gate to the North Pole, which he accesses to visit with Santa. You may find plain door ornaments kits and use your imagination to give it an attractive flair with varying colors, a mini wreath and lights.

Origins of Popular Traditions

Christmas invites popular traditions that are observed in most American homes. From caroling to hanging your stockings with care, the origins behind the celebrations are as important as the action themselves.

Educate your loved ones about the history that shaped the holiday events we know today.

HANGING STOCKINGS

According to the Smithsonian, the act of hanging stockings over the fireplace mantel is traced to a poem penned in 1823 by Clement Clark Moore. A line from the classic literature, "Visit from St. Nicholas," goes:

"And filled all the stockings;
then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of
his nose,
And giving a nod, up the
chimney he rose."

This famous snippet ultimately led children to hang their stockings on Christmas Eve in hopes that St. Nicholas would fill them with presents and candies.

DECORATING THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The History Channel says that the popularization of decorating the Christmas tree occurred in 1846 when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert posed with their family tree for the London News. Before that, German Lutherans were tied to the festivity since the 17th century and Christmas trees were spotted in Pennsylvania as early as 1820. The evergreen

tree is the traditional option as they are considered lucky because they remain green even in the winter months.

KISSING UNDER THE MISTLETOE

Dating back several thousand years ago, Celtic Druids thought the mistletoe plant had sacred powers, healed illnesses and sometimes predicted the future. It became a Christmas time tradition as the plant was gathered during the summer and displayed around the holidays.

The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe began in ancient Greece. It was first noticed during the festival of Saturnalia and eventually in wedding ceremonies.

SINGING CAROLS

The heritage of singing religious carols within groups has roots found in medieval times when citizens traveled from house to house to wish people good health. According to the Library of Congress, the tunes received a Christmas theme around the 1800s in America.

In the 1900s, cities like New York, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia saw a surge in caroling, leading to the release of commercialized songbooks. The events were used to raise money for children's charities.



An engraving published in the 1840s of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert created a craze for Christmas trees.

Organize a Lights Contest

Spruce up your community by inviting peers to partake in a decoration competition.

Of course, you should plan for the event in advance, so people have time to save money and prepare for their Christmas display.

The easiest way to gauge the public's interest in a contest is reaching out, either door-to-door or through a social media platform. Whether the event attracts a few neighbors or the entire block, the beautiful exhibit made by holiday enthusiasts' creativity will inspire a festive spirit. Check out some ideas on how to get started in developing competition and helping it grow larger each year.

CHOOSE A THEME

Compile a list of potential Christmas themes for the competition. For instance, consider encouraging participants to decorate their homes using popular cartoon characters, holiday legends or winter wonderlands.

If you have multiple participants, you can reward more winners by breaking up the event into different categories. Some ideas can be:

- Best use of light patterns.
- Most attractive apartment decor.
- Best outdoor Christmas tree decorations.

You should also have a dead-



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line in place for a completion date and a group of judges to decide the winners.

CHOOSING JUDGES

When looking for those in charge of declaring a champion, ask elected officials or local celebrities if they're interested. Involving a recognizable name

can help draw attention from residents from different neighborhoods. You should also consider allowing citizens from the community to cast their votes and rate factors like originality, presentation and functionality.

SEEKING PRIZES

Contests need prizes, and if

bragging rights aren't a big enough reward to give the winner, offer gift certificates or cash.

Don't hesitate to ask community businesses for donations to use as awards. In turn, offer free advertising for their companies by addressing their sponsorship during interviews

or social media posts.

MAKE IT FUN

Try to avoid being too over-competitive throughout the event. Treat it as a friendly competition between neighbors that helps strengthen your community while inspiring the Christmas spirit.