

How Nutritious Is Your Christmas?

Christmas is just around the corner, nudging us ever nearer to the time-honoured tradition of the Christmas Dinner, celebrated by families all around the world. However what makes up a yuletide feast changes significantly from country to country depending on the availability of fresh produce and age-old traditions: Christmas in the UK is based around turkey and all the trimmings, while Christmas in Indonesia is celebrated with sticky, sweet rice cakes. Here are how six different countries celebrate the festive season through food.

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1. United Kingdom



The traditional UK Christmas dinner is the centrepiece of festivities; roast turkey or goose with roast potatoes, and all the trimmings of stuffing, sprouts and cranberry sauce. However the evolution of eating turkey is relatively recent in English history, as the famous festive

fowl didn't arrive in the UK until the 1700s. In Medieval England the main course was either peacock or boar. The beloved mince pie was a recipe brought back from the Middle East by Crusaders, originally made with meat instead of the lovely fruits and spices we know today. However in the 17th century, Oliver Cromwell decided that this Christmas dish was too decadent, and banned eating it on Christmas Day – a law that has yet to be abolished!

Did you know? Brussel sprouts are one of the healthiest veggies around, and a fantastic source for your [key vitamins](#). Packed with Vitamin K and C, these little greens are full of antioxidants.

2. West Africa



Christmas in Ghana coincides with the cocoa harvest, so it is a time of wealth and celebration, when everyone returns home. Celebrating Christmas dinner with friends and family tops the list after attending church. A West African Christmas can see families feasting on rice and [sweet potato paste](#) called fufu with stew or okra soup, porridge and meats. Dinner is eaten outdoors with everyone sitting in a circle to share the festive feast. In Liberia, most homes have an oil palm for a Christmas tree, which is decorated with bells, and on Christmas morning, people are woken up by carols.

Did you know? Many countries in West Africa fortify staple foods, such as wheat flour, sugar and vegetable oil, so festive dishes, from rice to porridge, are packed with all the [right nutrients](#).

3. Canada



Christmas in Canada is a mix of old world tradition meets new. Turkey is still king at Christmas, with the traditions from the old colonial English past still holding on strong. Eggnog – a hot milk-based punch, sometimes infused with alcohol, proves very popular around the holidays. However other ethnic communities add their own old world traditions as well. In French Canadian Quebec they celebrate réveillon – a long dinner on the night before Christmas. Réveil means ‘waking’ in French as families normally stay awake until midnight to celebrate the new festive day. A Ukrainian Canadian family may eat a traditional Christmas meal of 12 meatless dishes, or may simply add perogies to a westernized meal.

Did you know? In 2014 the Canadian Government [committed \\$3.5 billion](#) to improving the health of mothers and children all over the world.

4. Indonesia

In tropical Indonesia, Santa doesn’t arrive in a sleigh with Rudolph in tow, but pedaling a rickshaw wearing traditional striped Javanese clothing, and followed by his elves dressed in Javanese attire. Traditional Indonesian feasting is led by a special Christmas treat, a sweet sticky cake made of rice called a ‘dodol’ and popular with children. Other customary dishes include pork in a soy sauce called pork ‘rica’ and sweet coconut cakes to celebrate the special season. Cookies are a must-have food during Christmas in Indonesia. Some popular types of cookies include ‘Nastar’ a butter cookie with pineapple jam filling, cheese cookies called ‘Kastengel’ and ‘Putri Salju’ or ‘Snow White’ cookies, a butter cookie covered with powdered sugar and cheese.

Did you know? Indonesia has [cut levels of malnutrition by half](#) since 1999 through a combination of increased food production and enhanced social protection.



5. The Netherlands



The festive season begins early in The Netherlands with celebrations starting on the 5th December. This is when groups of families and neighbours gather around a table with prepared fresh food on the long winter evening, and use their own little frying pan to cook and season their food in very small portions. This celebration of sharing is called ‘gourmet’, and its origin likely lies in the former Dutch colony, Indonesia. You better watch out when SinterKlass – a familiar cuddly figure with a white beard and a red suit – comes to town on the night to tell children who have been naughty or nice with presents.

Did you know? [The Dutch](#) have the healthiest diet in the world, and their nutritious habits continue with fresh food and varying diets at Christmas.

6. India



Less than 2.5% of Indians are Christian but Christmas is still widely celebrated all across the country, especially as it often coincides with the Winter Solstice, which is celebrated in India as 'Makar Sakranti'. Father Christmas also makes an appearance, as 'Christmas Baba' in Hindi and 'Christmas Thatthaa' in Tamil. Christmas dinner is observed by whole communities, called Lengkhawn Zai. People eat homemade cookies, as well as mutton stews and roast meats including duck. Athirasam, a sweet made in South India especially during festivals are popular in India as in Christmas pudding.

Did you know? [One of every three malnourished children in the world lives in India.](#) Girls are more at risk of malnutrition than boys because of their lower social status.

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