

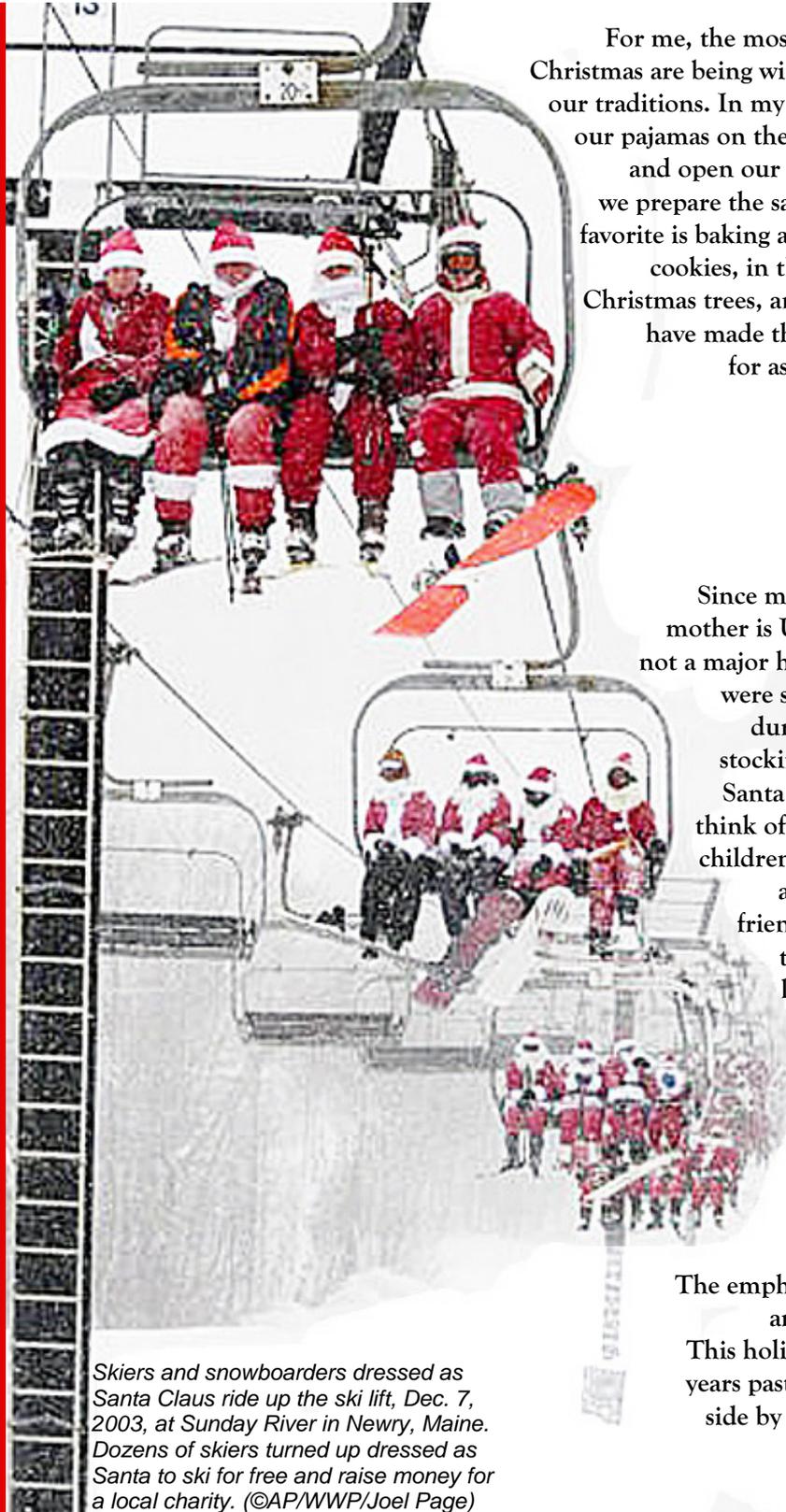


'TIS THE SEASON

"'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!" - sounds familiar? In the United States, the time before and during Christmas is indeed the season to be joyful, to decorate the Christmas tree, send and enjoy received Christmas cards, as well as to buy and wrap Christmas gifts for family and friends.

However, controversies also surround Christmas in the United States. Some people fear the holiday has become commercialized with shops being decorated with Christmas ornaments from the end of November to lure more customers. Others wonder perhaps whether the large number of Americans who embrace religions other than Christianity do not feel excluded from such an omnipresent celebration.

Zoom asked some Americans what they felt was most important about Christmas. Read their answers on the right.



Skiers and snowboarders dressed as Santa Claus ride up the ski lift, Dec. 7, 2003, at Sunday River in Newry, Maine. Dozens of skiers turned up dressed as Santa to ski for free and raise money for a local charity. (©AP/WWP/Joel Page)

For me, the most important things about Christmas are being with family and celebrating our traditions. In my family, we always put on our pajamas on the night of December 24th and open our gifts. On Christmas day, we prepare the same foods every year - my favorite is baking and decorating Christmas cookies, in the shapes of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and stars. My sisters and I have made these cookies at Christmas for as long as I can remember.

Rachel

Since my father is Jewish and my mother is Unitarian, Christmas was not a major holiday for us. When we were small, we lit the menorah during Chanukah and hung stockings on Christmas Eve for Santa to fill. As an adult, I still think of Christmas as primarily a children's holiday - a time to give and receive presents from friends and family. It is also a time to think about those less fortunate and to help the needy by participating in various charitable activities.

Anna

The emphasis on family and giving are most important to me. This holiday helps us to reflect on years past and welcome the future side by side with people who are important to us.

Karen

■ Peace, Happiness, iPod?

When asked by polling institutions, Americans reveal that what they wish for the most in the holiday season of 2005 is peace, happiness and good health. Then, however, a much longer list of purchasable items follows. Let's see what electronic tools and gadgets are objects of desire for many Americans this season.

According to some surveys, every third American hopes to get an item in the category of consumer electronics with the MP3 player being the hottest seller. Following the MP3 player, the wish list for the respondents included, in order of preference:



The RipFlash Pro (left), a flash memory based combination MP3 player/recorder and voice recording device, and the Flipster, a multimedia player from PoGo! Products, are shown. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

plasma television, digital camera, laptop PC, big screen TV, desktop PC, video game system, high-definition television, DVD recorder, and home theater speakers or system.

The average lifespan of the most popular and already iconic MP3 player - the iPod - is about 1.5 years. Older models are most often handed down to family members or friends, but they can also be sold or traded for a new one. Some people actually hunt out-dated models at Internet auctions because they like their, by now, "retro" look.

The iPod or other MP3 player owners can use services such as Apple's iTunes and Napster for fee-based digital downloading. They pay per month for an unlimited number of songs or for each track. In 2004, consumers purchased over 91 million digital tracks, a 376% increase from the year before! Over 35% of Americans aged 12 and older have paid to download music.

What's in the future for the electronic gadgets? According to an article in *Wired* magazine, the gadgets of the future will be simpler, that is they will no longer combine dozens of functions as most people look for just a few in one product. This applies not only to portable devices but also to computer software. Moreover, mobile phones are likely to influence our social lives to an even greater extent. We can expect mapping programs that show us whether any of our friends are nearby, reference software to look up the restaurant where we might have a meal, and better functioning voice-recognition applications.



A player tries Activisions Tony Hawks Pro Skater video game release on the "N-Gage," Nokia's hybrid phone. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



The Creative Zen Portable Media Center (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)



Kodak's prototype digital camera built in 1975 by Eastman Kodak engineer Steven J. Sasson, is shown next to Kodak's latest digital camera, the EasyShare One, at Kodak headquarters in Rochester, N.Y., Aug. 17, 2005. (AP Photo/David Duprey)



Workers at the Samsung booth of the 2005 Consumer Electronics Show at the Las Vegas Convention Center adjust the world's largest plasma television, a 102-inch screen prototype. (AP Photo/Joe Cavaretta)

■ A Visit from St. Nicholas



Santa at his recent visit to Hungary

'Tis December 24, the day before Christmas, and all through the land, families will send excited children to bed with a reading of Clement Moore's classic poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

Moore is thought to have composed the tale, now popularly known as "The Night Before Christmas," on December 24, 1822, while traveling home from Greenwich Village, where he had bought a turkey for his family's Christmas dinner. Inspired by the

plump, bearded Dutchman who took him by sleigh on his errand through the snow-covered streets of New York City, Moore penned "A Visit from St. Nicholas" for the amusement of his six children, with whom he shared the poem that evening. His vision of St. Nicholas draws upon Dutch-American and Norwegian traditions of a magical, gift-giving figure who appears at Christmas time, as well as the German legend of a visitor who enters homes through chimneys.

Twelve Christmas-related words are missing from the poem. Insert them back, selecting from the alphabetical list below.

*chimney - Christmas - chubby - elf - fur - hoof
reindeer - shutters - sleigh - stockings - toys - whistle*

Language tip!

Could you have guessed that Americans send nearly 2 billion holiday cards each year? This provides them a way to connect with friends and family who often live very far away.

When you send a card to someone of a different religion, choose one with a secular design (without religious figures or symbols) and neutral text, such as "Season's Greetings" or "Happy Holidays."

Some other possible simple wordings of your holiday greetings:

neutral:
Greetings of the Season and Best Wishes for the New Year

for those who celebrate Christmas:
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

or why not use a quote from a song:
Wishing you a Merry Little Christmas...

You can also send your friends an e-card from many popular websites including www.amazon.com, www.yahoo.com, www.bluemountain.com, or www.americangreetings.com.

A Visit from St. Nicholas

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all thro' the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The _____ were hung by the _____ with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar plums danc'd in their heads,
And Mama in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap --
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the _____, and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow,
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below;
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature _____, and eight tiny _____,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick,
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and call'd them by name:
"Now! Dasher, now! Dancer, now! Prancer, and Vixen,
"On! Comet, on! Cupid, on! Dunder and Blixem;
"To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
"Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of _____ -- and St. Nicholas too:
And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little _____.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound:
He was dress'd all in _____, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnish'd with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys was flung on his back,
And he look'd like a peddler just opening his pack;
His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry,
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry;
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow.
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face, and a little round belly
That shook when he laugh'd, like a bowl full of jelly:
He was _____ and plump, a right jolly old _____,
And I laugh'd when I saw him in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And fill'd all the stockings; then turn'd with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.
He sprung to his sleigh, to his team gave a _____,
And away they all flew, like the down of a thistle:
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight --
Happy _____ to all, and to all a good night.

Activity Page

Win a Prize!

To win a prize answer this question:

What are the names of Santa's eight reindeers?

Send your answer to zoom@usembassy.hu

Please give your name and address.

Deadline:
January 20, 2006

Good Luck!

ZOOM
in on america

Zoom is available online at

www.usembassy.hu/zoom.html

Please send comments and requests for subscription to:
zoom@usembassy.hu

Regional English Language Office
relomail@usembassy.hu

Information Resource Center
infousa@usembassy.hu

Mailing address:
U.S. Embassy
Public Affairs Section
1054 Budapest
Szabadság tér 12.

■ Moving Around

In "A Visit from St. Nicholas" there are many words describing movements of the whole body or its parts. Some are used as verbs and some as nouns. In the exercise below we converted some nouns into verbs. Match the words in the first column and their meaning in the second column.

to stir	to turn something
to wink	to move oneself or something abruptly
to nod	to jump up or forward quickly
to spring	to move the head down and up quickly, usually to signal agreement
to twist	to make a small movement with the whole body
to jerk	to close and open an eye quickly, usually to give a signal

■ Acronyms

The world of electronics just LOVES acronyms. Insert the missing words in the explanations of acronyms.

GSM	Global System for _____ Communications
PC	_____ Computer
DVD	_____ Video Disk
MP3	_____ audio layer 3
WAP	_____ Application Protocol
GPRS	General Packet _____ Service
JP(E)G	Joint _____ (Experts') Group

Find correct answers at: www.usembassy.hu/quiz_key.html

■ Glossary — With page numbers where the words appear.

bound - a slight jump (3)	to lure - to attract, to tempt (1)
charitable - relating to charity (1)	lustre (or luster) - brightness (3)
chubby - pleasantly fat (3)	menorah - a candlestick with seven or nine candles used in Jewish religion (1)
clatter - noise (3)	omnipresent - present everywhere (1)
courser(s) - animal that pulls a vehicle (3)	out-dated - no longer current (2)
dash away - to run suddenly; at once; in a moment (3)	peddler - a salesman who carries his object for sale (3)
dimple - a little hollow place on the skin, usually showing when someone smiles (3)	to paw - to push with a foot (usually in reference to animals) (3)
down of a thistle (phrase) - soft part of a prickly wildflower (3)	plump - pleasantly fat (3)
droll - amusing or humorous (3)	to prance - to dance about (usually in reference to animals) (3)
elf (pl.elves) - a small mischievous creature in mythology (3)	sash - window (3)
to embrace - to take up (1)	secular - of or relating to worldly concerns(3)
ere - before (poetic) (3)	snug - comfortable (3)
gadget - a small modern specialized device (2)	stump - short piece (3)
jolly - cheerful (1)	survey - a poll (2)
lifespan - length of life (2)	' twas - it was (poetic) (3)