



The New Year

Golden Talk Series



Iran-Australia



Christmas & The New Year

How are the origins of Christmas and New Year different?

Christmas (celebrated on December 25) originates from Christian traditions celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, while New Year's Day (January 1) is a **secular** celebration **marking the beginning of** the calendar year. Christmas has deep religious significance for Christians, involving church services and religious rituals. In contrast, New Year's celebrations are more universal, focusing on themes of renewal and fresh starts, often devoid of specific religious **connotations**.

Why do people celebrate Christmas and New Year differently?

The celebrations of Christmas and New Year differ due to their distinct origins and cultural meanings. Christmas, being a religious and family-centric holiday, is often celebrated with intimate gatherings, gift exchanges, and religious observances. New Year's celebrations, however, **are characterized by** social gatherings, fireworks, and public events, reflecting its nature as a more universal celebration of time passing and new beginnings.

What does the new year symbolize in different cultures?

In various cultures, the New Year symbolizes new beginnings, hope, and the potential for change. It's seen as a time to reflect on the past year and set goals for the future. Many cultures have unique rituals and celebrations that reflect these themes, such as the Spanish tradition of eating grapes for luck or the Japanese custom of ringing temple bells.

How do new year celebrations reflect cultural values?

New year celebrations often reflect key cultural values such as family, community, prosperity, and renewal. For example, in many Asian cultures, Lunar New Year celebrations focus on **family reunions** and honoring ancestors, reflecting the importance of family and tradition. In Western cultures, New Year's Eve parties and fireworks display a focus on celebration and joy.

New Year Traditions

What unique New Year traditions are observed in the US?

Unique New Year traditions in the US include the iconic Ball Drop in Times Square, New York City, watching college football bowl games, and eating specific foods like black-eyed peas for good luck. Many Americans also engage in making New Year's resolutions and attending parties to celebrate **the countdown to** the new year.

How do Americans typically celebrate the first day of the New Year?

The first day of the New Year in the US is often a time for relaxation and family. Many people enjoy a **leisurely day**, with some engaging in activities like watching the Rose Parade, attending religious services, or enjoying a special meal. It's a time to recover from the previous night's celebrations and start the new year with a sense of peace and rejuvenation.



How is the New Year celebrated in different parts of the U.K.?

England's most notable New Year's Eve celebration, also referred to as Old Year's Night, takes place in the heart of London. Here, the stroke of midnight is marked by the ringing of Big Ben. In recent years, this historical moment has been further **amplified** by a significant fireworks show, launched from the London Eye, one of the city's most famous landmarks.

Apart from London, other key cities like Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, and Newcastle also host major New Year celebrations, each offering its distinctive festivities.



Happy New Year!

2024

New Year, New Gifts

How is gift-giving incorporated into New Year celebrations in the U.S.?

In the U.S., gift-giving is more **closely associated with** Christmas than the New Year. However, some people may exchange gifts on New Year's Eve or Day, often **as a gesture of** goodwill or to symbolize a fresh start. It's less about the value of the gift and more about **the sentiment behind it**.

The core of the U.S. Christmas tradition involves the exchange of gifts among family and friends. This practice is a way to show love and appreciation and is often **the highlight of** Christmas celebrations. The exchange typically happens on Christmas morning, though some families might open gifts on Christmas Eve.

A central figure in U.S. Christmas celebrations is Santa Claus, who is believed to bring gifts to children on Christmas Eve. Children often hang stockings by the fireplace, which Santa fills with small gifts, treats, and candies. Larger presents are usually placed under the Christmas tree, with children waking up on Christmas morning to find them.

It's customary to exchange smaller gifts or tokens of appreciation with neighbors, teachers, service providers, and

acquaintances. These gifts are often simple, like baked goods, candles, or small home accessories.

Sending Christmas cards, often with a family photo or yearly update, is **a longstanding tradition** in the U.S. These cards serve as a way to keep in touch with distant friends and relatives and are sometimes **accompanied by** a small gift.

What are common gift-giving practices during the holiday season in the US and UK?

In both the US and UK, gift-giving is a central part of the holiday season, typically involving the exchange of presents among family and friends. In the US, this often happens on Christmas Day, while in the U.K., it might occur on Christmas Day or Boxing Day. Gifts are often placed under a Christmas tree and exchanged in a festive environment. The act of giving and receiving presents is a way to **show affection** and appreciation.

Celebrating the Charm of Santa



How did the concept of Santa Claus originate?

The concept of Santa Claus originated from Saint Nicholas, a 4th-century Christian bishop known for his generosity. Over centuries, his legend **merged with other folklore** and customs, evolving into the modern figure of Santa Claus - a **jolly, gift-giving character** associated with Christmas.

What cultural influences shaped the modern image of Santa Claus?

The modern image of Santa **Claus has been shaped by** a combination of various cultural influences, including Dutch, British, and American traditions. The Dutch Sinterklaas, British Father Christmas, and the American version popularized by Clement Clarke Moore's poem and Thomas Nast's illustrations all contributed to **the current portrayal of Santa as a cheerful, red-suited, gift-bringing figure.**

How do different cultures incorporate Santa Claus into their New Year traditions?

While Santa Claus is primarily associated with Christmas, in some cultures, his role extends into New Year celebrations. For instance, in Russian and other Eastern European traditions, Santa-like figures (such as Ded Moroz) play a part in New Year's festivities, often involving gift-giving and children's entertainment.

In cultures where Santa Claus is part of New Year traditions, he is often integrated into local customs. For example, in Russia, Ded Moroz (Father Frost) visits children during New Year celebrations, which is the primary holiday for gift-giving, similar to Santa's role in Western Christmas traditions.

Beyond the Red Suit

Why do some people criticize the concept of Santa Claus?

Criticisms of Santa Claus often **stem from** concerns about **materialism**, lying to children, and the **commercialization** of Christmas. Some argue that the emphasis on receiving gifts from Santa **detracts from** the holiday's true meaning and encourages materialistic values in children. Others are uncomfortable with the idea of **deceiving** children about Santa's existence.

Critics argue that Santa Claus has become a symbol of **consumerism** and the commercialization of Christmas, often used in marketing and advertising. They also believe that emphasizing gift-receiving, especially lavish or numerous presents from Santa, **instills** materialistic tendencies in children from a young age.

Another major criticism involves the ethics of parents telling children that Santa Claus is real, seen by some as **deceptive**. This **deception** is believed to potentially **undermine** trust between children and parents and foster **skepticism** or **cynicism** in children.

Finally, the Santa **narrative**, where 'good' children receive gifts and 'bad' ones do not, is seen as creating a **transactional** view of morality. There are concerns that this narrative links good behavior to material rewards, potentially distorting children's understanding of kindness and generosity.



New Year Resolutions

What are New Year's resolutions?

New Year's resolutions are commitments or goals that individuals set for themselves at the beginning of the New Year. These resolutions typically focus on self-improvement, such as adopting healthier habits, learning new skills, or changing certain behaviors. The idea is to use the start of the new year as a motivational fresh start to improve one's life in various aspects.

The concept of New Year's resolutions is not new. It dates back to ancient times. For instance, the Babylonians are believed to have been the first to make New Year's resolutions, some 4,000 years ago. They reportedly made promises to their gods at the start of each year to return borrowed objects and pay their debts. The Romans continued this tradition, making promises to the god Janus, after whom January is named.

In modern times, New Year's resolutions have become a trending topic, with social media flooded with content and discussions about setting and achieving these goals.

Is it foolish to make New Year resolutions?

While setting New Year resolutions is a popular tradition, it can sometimes be seen as a somewhat immature approach. This mindset implies that personal growth is time-bound, potentially leading to procrastination and a lack of consistent commitment to self-improvement. However, for some, New Year resolutions offer a clear, motivational starting point. They provide an opportunity for structured reflection and goal-setting. It's true that there's potential for growth at any time of the year—not just its beginning—, but the symbolic fresh start of a New Year can be a powerful catalyst for change for many people.

To set realistic, achievable resolutions:

1. Focus on specific, measurable goals.
2. Break them down into smaller, manageable steps.
3. Ensure they align with your true interests and values.
4. Regularly reviewing progress and adjusting goals as needed can also enhance their attainability.

You Need to Know...

- **Midnight kiss** – A romantic tradition of kissing someone at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve.
- **Countdown** – The act of counting backwards to zero to mark the transition from New Year's Eve to New Year's Day.
- **Ball Drop** – A famous event in Times Square, New York, where a large ball descends a pole to signal the start of the New Year.
- **Midnight Toast** – A significant moment at New Year parties and gatherings, often captured and shared on social media, symbolizing new beginnings.
- **Eggnog** – A rich, creamy beverage traditionally consumed during the Christmas season.
- **Mistletoe** – A plant hung up during the Christmas season, under which it is customary to kiss.
- **Secret Santa** – A gift exchange tradition where people are randomly assigned a person to whom they give a gift anonymously.
- **White Christmas** – A Christmas with snow on the ground, often idealized in songs and movies.
- **Black Friday** is celebrated on the Friday following Thanksgiving in the United States and is indirectly related to the New Year as it marks the beginning of the holiday shopping season, leading up to Christmas and eventually the New Year.
- **Jingle Bells** – A popular Christmas song, also used to describe the festive, bell-like decorations.
- **New Year's Eve** – New Year's Eve is celebrated annually on December 31st, marking the final day of the Gregorian calendar year.
- **Christmas Eve** – The evening or entire day before Christmas Day, often celebrated with its own traditions.
- **New Year's resolution** – A commitment that an individual makes on New Year's Day to a personal goal, project, or reforming a habit.
- **New year, new me** – A common phrase used on social media, symbolizing a fresh start and the desire for personal change with the New Year.
- **Resolution trackers** – Apps or digital tools shared on social media to help users track and maintain their New Year resolutions.
- **Boxing Day** – A holiday celebrated the day after Christmas Day, observed in many countries.
- **Year-in-Review posts** – Social media trend where individuals and organizations post highlights and reflections of the past year.
- **Year-ahead predictions** – Posts and discussions predicting trends, events, or changes for the upcoming year.
- **Live-streaming events** – The broadcasting of New Year's Eve events, concerts, and celebrations in real-time over social media platforms.

Questions to Think about

1. How do cultures blend Christmas and New Year traditions?
2. Can you think of any commonality between the New Year celebration in your culture and the New Year traditions discussed in this article?
3. **Debate:** Some people passionately embrace the New Year traditions, while others find these rituals unnecessary and choose not to participate. Which perspective resonates more with you? What reasons would you provide to support your viewpoint?
4. How does the US incorporate gift-giving at the New Year's?
5. Are there any similarities between gift-giving traditions in the US and the gift exchange in your culture near the New Year?
6. **Debate:** Is Santa Claus a charming holiday figure promoting generosity, or a symbol of consumerism and dishonesty to children? Is the tradition of Santa Claus more harmful than beneficial?
7. **Fact:** In the U.S., billions are wasted annually on unwanted individual and corporate gifts, contributing to returns, environmental impact, and inefficiencies in spending and resource utilization.
Debate questions: Are New Year gift-giving customs a meaningful tradition fostering generosity, or a consumer-driven practice promoting materialism? Is New Year gift-giving a beneficial custom or an unnecessary indulgence?
8. **Debate:** Are New Year's resolutions foolish or a meaningful way to catalyze self-improvement? Provide reasons to support your viewpoint.
9. Do you set New Year's resolutions every year? How successful have you been in achieving these goals?
10. Why does the celebration of the New Year change over time? How have the New Year traditions in your country changed over time?

