

Norwegian Holidays

Christmas in Norway

Compiled by Janna Armbruster

Christmas festivities in Norway start with Advent (*Adventgave* or *Kaledegave*). Small gifts are given each day in December or Advent Calendars with chocolate candies are also popular. This is also a time when Christmas shopping is in full swing. Many businesses, organizations, and groups of friends throw Christmas parties. Restaurants and clubs in Oslo, Bergen and other large cities are very busy with party goers.

The actual family gift exchange is done on Christmas Eve. Church bells ring at 5:00 p.m. signaling the start of Christmas Eve. Dinner is eaten and the family attend church service. After service, presents are opened at home. Sometimes the gifts are brought by *Julenissen*, a Norwegian Santa Claus. Presents can also be delivered by gnomes called *Nisse*. You better leave some rice porridge for them so they will stick around and guard the farm animals. In some parts of Norway, children dress up in costumes representing the characters in the Christmas Story while singing Christmas Carols. Lighting a candle each night in advent is another family tradition.

The most famous tradition presently is the presentation of a huge Norwegian tree to England at the beginning of the season. It is placed in Trafalgar Square in the center of London, decorated and with a tree lighting ceremony, admired by Brits during the season.

Many American Norwegians have taken part in a traditional Norwegian custom when we have made the woven hearts that hang on the Christmas trees in Norway. Called *julekurver*, they are sometimes stuffed with candy. American Norwegians also bake the customary 7 cookies, and *julekake*, a cake with dried fruit, cinnamon and cardamom. Christmas dinner in Norway is really quite special. A rice pudding is served with butter, cinnamon, and sugar into which whipped cream is folded. An almond is placed into the pudding. If you find the almond in your serving you win a marzipan pig. The main course in dinner could be a selection of one of the following or several together: pork ribs, pork belly, *lutefisk* (cod cured in lye), dry cured ribs of land, ham or turkey. Beer and *glogg* are drunk with the festive meal. *Pepperkake* cookies are for dessert or the dough can be baked into ginger bread houses which are eaten at the end of the season.

It has only been recently that Norwegians have put lights on the outside of their homes preferring to bring greenery from nature into their homes and decorate their tree with Christmas ornaments.