

# Weihnachten

In preparation for Weihnachten (Christmas), many German families celebrate Advent. This is a time of religious preparation for the arrival of das Christkind (the Christ Child). Traditional advent activities include the Adventskranz ([Advent wreath](#)), which is set up on the 4th Sunday before Christmas Day, the beginning of the season. Four candles adorn the wreath, and a new one is lit each week. Families often sing Christmas carols as they gather around the wreath to celebrate the preparation and Christmas season.

Children also enjoy the Christmas calendar, which contains twenty-four doors (one for each day of December leading up to Christmas). Children open one door each day, and find a chocolate treat awaiting them. Many of the calendars also include pictures inside the doors, often Christmas-related. A significant part of the Christmas build-up occurs on 6 December, when it is Nikolaustag, a day commemorating [Saint Nicholas](#). On the evening of 5 December, children place a Nikolausstiefel (a boot or a shoe) in front of their door. Overnight, the Nikolaus, a figure similar in appearance to Santa Claus (German: Der Weihnachtsmann), visits the house and fills the boots with sweets and sometimes even smaller presents if the children were good; otherwise they are left with only a rute (a cane composed of birch twigs).

During the Christmas period, the [Weihnachtsmarkt](#) (Christmas market) becomes a feature of almost every German city, town or village, where visitors enjoy stalls, entertainment, and savour food and [Glühwein](#) (mulled wine). Famous Christmastime treats include [Lebkuchen](#) (gingerbread), [Stollen](#) (fruit cake), and [Marzipan](#) (confectionery often made into sweets). Perhaps the most famous of these markets is the [Christkindlesmarkt](#) held in [Nuremberg](#), that attracts millions of visitors every year.

The Weihnachtsbaum ([Christmas Tree](#)) is usually put up in the afternoon of 24 December. The trees can be bought at special traders' sites, but some Germans may still go into the forests and cut one themselves.

In some families the whole family comes together; in others December 24 is celebrated only by the close family, whereas the larger family (grandparents, uncles and aunts, etc.) will visit on the first or second Day of Christmas (December 25 and 26 respectively). Christmas is December 24th in Germany and Christmas Eve is also December 24th. In Germany Christmas Eve doesn't mean the day before Christmas.

Before the Bescherung (gift giving) begins, many Germans go to church. Christmas masses/services often last around one hour. Families with children go to a children's mass which is usually shorter and dramatised with a Krippenspiel, which is a [nativity play](#). The customs held upon returning from church leading to the gift giving vary across Germany.

One of the most common situations sees the returning children wait to enter into their (locked) living room until a little bell rings. This bell marks the departure of the one delivering gifts. In the more Catholic regions of Germany - primarily the south - this is considered the Christ Child ([Christkind](#)), while North Germans commonly considers it to be the Weihnachtsmann ([Saint Nicholas](#) or [Santa Claus](#)) who is exiting.

The children then enter to see the decorated Weihnachtsbaum, with all the presents beneath wrapped in colorful paper, that has been prepared by an adult while they were away at church. Adults may also share gifts while the children are opening theirs. For the Bescherung, the only light comes from the Christmas tree lights (in the past generated by real candles, though today generally replaced by electric lights).

# Ostern

Ostern (Easter) is celebrated differently across Germany. Most traditions include hiding colorfully painted eggs in the garden or the house for the children to find. Many families also share presents such as sweets, chocolate or small gifts. The children are told that the presents are brought by a bunny, the Osterhase (Easter-bunny), which carries them on its back. In pictures, the bunny usually looks more like a rabbit .

## **Feste**

There is a great variety of festivities across Germany, with each region having own festivities especially in summer.

The internationally known Oktoberfest is not part of the general German traditions, as it is only celebrated in Bavaria.