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Photos: Amazing Christmas Celebrations All Around The World



experiences

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Christmas is celebrated all over the world, but the way people mark the holiday varies widely from place to place. The Japanese erect vast electric light spectacles. Merchants of Gavle, Sweden, build a four-story-tall straw goat—and many years some vandal burns it down. In Austria, St. Nicholas is

accompanied by a demon known as Krampus, while in the Netherlands, Sinterklaas is assisted by “Black Pete,” a black-faced character who has prompted charges of racism. And in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, where the faithful believe the child Jesus at the heart of Christianity was born two millennia ago, the Church of the Nativity is undergoing renovations. (Click on any photo to enlarge.)

Australia



The Richards family reclaimed their world record by stringing up more than half a million Christmas lights around their home in suburban Canberra, Australia. Guinness World Records official Chris Sheedy confirmed on Nov. 25, 2013, that they had the most Christmas lights on a residential property with 502,165 twinkling bulbs. (AP Photo/AAPIMAGE, Alan Porritt)

Austria



A man dressed as a Krampus, the companion of St. Nicholas and one of Austria's unique Christmas traditions, makes his way during a traditional Krampus procession in Lofer, the Austrian province of Salzburg, on Nov. 30, 2013. The Krampus is said to punish naughty children. (AP Photo/Kerstin Joensson)

Brazil



A Christmas tree (pictured above and at top) floats in Lagoa Lake during the annual holiday tree lighting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Nov. 30, 2013. (AP Photo/Victor R. Caivano)

Czech Republic



A man dressed as a devil scares a boy during a St. Nicholas parade at the Old Town Square in Prague, Czech Republic, on Dec. 5, 2012. During this traditional procession people dressed as St. Nicholas, angels and devils reward well-behaved children with small presents. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek)

France



A giant Santa Claus sits in his sleigh on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France, on Dec. 14, 2013. (AP Photo/Lionel Cironneau)

Germany



People walk along the Christmas Fair in front of the Mariendom (Cathedral of Mary) and St. Severi's Church in Erfurt, Germany, on Nov. 27, 2013. The Erfurt Christmas Market decorates the town's square with a huge candle-lit Christmas tree and a large hand-carved wooden creche. (AP Photo/Jens Meyer)



Two women walk in front of a Christmas illumination at the Christmas market at Breitscheid Place in Berlin, Germany, on Nov. 25, 2013. The opening of the markets in Berlin signifies the start of the 2013 Christmas season. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)

Greece



An illuminated boat—an old Greek symbol—decorates Athens' Syntagma Square in front of the Greek parliament on Dec. 13, 2013. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)

Japan



People gather to watch Christmas Illuminations in Tokyo, Japan, on Dec. 7, 2013. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)



Christmas illuminations at Tokyo's Shiodome district on Dec. 22, 2012.(AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)



Christmas illuminations at a Tokyo park in Japan on Dec. 22, 2009. (AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)

Monaco



Snow white trees decorate the front of the Monte Carlo Casino in Monaco for Christmas and New Year's on Dec. 11, 2013. (AP Photo/Lionel Cironneau)

Netherlands



Giant inflatable puppets by the French street theatre company Les Plasticiens Volant hover over a square in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on Nov. 21, 2013, as part of a celebration marking the start of the Christmas shopping season. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



People line a road to watch the arrival of Sinterklaas, the Dutch version of Santa Claus, and his blackface sidekicks “Zwarte Piet,” or “Black Pete,” in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on Nov. 17, 2013. Critics charge that Black Petes are an offensive caricature of black people while proponents say Pete is a figure of fun whose appearance is harmless, his face soot-stained from going down chimneys to deliver presents for the children. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



People dressed as “Zwarte Piet” or “Black Pete,” wave to spectators as they arrive by steamboat in Hoorn, Netherlands, on Nov. 16, 2013. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Palestinian Territories



Tourists walk around the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Dec. 10, 2013. Wrapped in scaffolding, the basilica is having a much-needed facelift after 600 years. Last year it was included in UNESCO's list of endangered World Heritage sites. (AP Photo/Nasser Nasser)

Philippines



Filipino Catholics attend the first dawn Mass at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila on Dec. 16, 2013. Many Filipinos attend nine consecutive dawn Masses before Christmas as part of traditional Filipino practice in this largely Roman Catholic nation. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Poland



Christmas illuminations light up Royal Treaty Street in Warsaw, Poland, on Dec. 7, 2013. (AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski)



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Portugal



Christmas illuminations reflect on the ground in downtown Lisbon, Portugal, on Dec. 13, 2013. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

Sweden



Each year since about 1966, merchants of Gavle, Sweden, have erected a 4-story-tall Christmas straw goat. In about half the years, the giant creature has burned during the holiday season, including on Dec. 12 last year. The 1976 goat was hit by a car. In 1997, it was damaged by fireworks. From 1998 to 2001, it was set ablaze before the end of December. These photos show it before and after it was torched on Dec. 21, 2004. The vandals are seldom caught, but during Christmas 2001, the goat was set on fire on Dec. 23 by a 51-year-old visitor from Cleveland, Ohio. The culprit, Lawrence Jones, was convicted of inflicting gross damage and spent 18 days in jail. (AP Photo / Per-Erik Jaderberg)

United States



Santa Claus arrives by outrigger canoe at Waikiki in Honolulu, Hawaii, on Dec. 24, 2007. (AP Photo/Lucy Pemoni)



More than 425 people dressed as Santas participated in the "Santa Ski Crawl" skiing from Uley's Ice Bar at Crested Butte Mountain Resort in Colorado on Dec. 14, 2013. (AP Photo/Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Nathan Bilow)

The Vatican



An 82-foot-tall Christmas tree from Bavaria, Germany, lights up St. Peter's Square, next to St. Peter's Basilica, at the Vatican, on Dec. 13, 2013. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)