



By: *Catriona M. Munro*, TA Editor in Chief

That Christmas Thing



Christmas, of course, arrives annually in a multifarious variety in many different countries, regardless of any national religion. I've experienced how it's celebrated throughout Europe, in further flung Christian countries and Islamic countries generous enough to provide similar gifts and foodfests.

The main difference - surprise, surprise - between the UK and most Continental European nations, is that we, the UK, tend to eat our "Christmas dinner" early afternoons on 25 December; our European neighbours prefer la grande bouffe or das grosse Fressen the night before.

I've only read about Norwegian lutefisk and salted Polish carp. The Spanish also tend to eat their Christmas dinner - Miso del Gallo (Mass of the Rooster) before Midnight Mass.

It is allegedly named allegedly because a rooster crowed while Jesus was being born, not that the Messiah was being denied by his best friend. At that point.

Christmas in Colombia

One of my favourite Christmasses was in Colombia, when the country was engaged in a full-blown civil war in the early 2000s.

There was an annual cease-fire between the government forces and the militant terrorists known as the FARC. Around a week before Christmas, a giant star was illuminated on top of a hill in FARC territory, and small nativity shrines appeared intermittently on every pavement.

"Pray to the baby Jesus that we will arrest the narcos" our local colleagues chanted. There were countless life-sized Santas clinging to the walls of many houses, armed with the obligatory sack.

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So it is basically a cultural and religious celebration observed by many people. For some people, it's a pagan, winter festival with no religious connotations.

And as the US comedy show Seinfeld established, another name for Christmaas - for those in the know - Christmas is called Festivus.

A simultaneous celebration, strictly speaking non-Christian but widely known as an alternative, It is known as Kwanzaa, an African-American and pan-African festival.

It is largely Swahili-based, and shows respect for family, history, values, community and culture, and lasts for a week beginning 26 December.

So regardless of beliefs, practices and desires, a very happy Christmas - or whatever you'd like to call it - to everyone.