



**CHRISTMAS
IS IN THE AIR!**

Hohoho Merry Christmas!

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?

Christmas is celebrated to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God.

The name 'Christmas' comes from the Mass of Christ (or Jesus). A Mass service (which is sometimes called Communion or Eucharist) is where Christians remember that Jesus died for us and then came back to life. The 'Christ-Mass' service was the only one that was allowed to take place after sunset (and before sunrise the next day), so people had it at Midnight! So we get the name Christ-Mass, shortened to Christmas.

Christmas is now celebrated by people around the world, whether they are Christians or not. It's a time when family and friends come together and remember the good things they have. People, and especially children, also like Christmas as it's a time when you give and receive presents!



A young girl with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a white lace-trimmed dress, stands in a festive winter setting. Behind her is a large Christmas tree adorned with warm white lights and snowflake ornaments. To her right is a large, white, snow-like decorative structure. The scene is set against a backdrop of snow-covered ground and a blue sky. The entire image is framed by a light blue border with white floral and leaf patterns.

SILENT NIGHT

Claire Ryann

1. Starting Christmas in the -ber months

If you look up “longest Christmas season in the world”, the Philippines will come up as a result. For most, Christmas starts in December. But for Filipinos, Christmas starts the moment it’s September.

There’s no textbook explanation for why we celebrate Christmas so early, but there are theories. Perhaps it’s because of our predominantly Catholic beliefs.

SEPTEMBER

SUNDAY

1

MONDAY

2

TUESDAY

3

WEDNESDAY

4

THURSDAY

5

8

9

10

11

12

15

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Constitution Day

24

25

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2. Setting up a Belen

In most countries, nativity scenes – also known as the belen – are only set up in churches or other religious spaces. But in the Philippines, it's common to find it everywhere. In fact, every Filipino household will have one set up during the festive season.



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3. Adorning buildings and posts with a parol

Everyone knows about Christmas lights, but the Philippines has the *parol*, a Christmas ornament unique to us.

Traditionally, *parols* come in the shape of a big circle with a star in the middle, but you can also choose from various designs like stars and flowers. It can also be made from different materials like plastic, wire, wood, or even recyclable materials.

The *parol* was originally made to hang on lamp posts to guide mass-goers to *Simbang Gabi*, but now they can be found everywhere like outside houses, in malls, and offices.



Foto: AFP



4. Attending Simbang Gabi

Simbang Gabi means “night mass”, which is basically what it is. Filipinos attend mass either late at night or in the wee hours of the morning for all 9 days before Christmas. We try to complete all 9 days, both as a religious practice and because of the belief that attending all 9 masses will grant you a wish.





5. Indulging in Christmas food like bibingka and puto bumbong

Staying up or getting up for *Simbang Gabi* might make you *hungry*, but a serving of *bibingka* and *puto bumbong* should do the trick and calm you down. These are the two most popular and most loved Christmas treats that Filipinos never miss out on.

Both are variations of rice cakes – *bibingka* is baked in clay pots and leaves, while *puto bumbong* is steamed in bamboo tubes.



6. Caroling from house to house

For most countries, Christmas caroling means a whole production of good vocals, coordinated outfits, instruments, and well-practiced Christmas tunes. For us, it's become a humorous affair.

Filipino kids and adults alike go from house to house, starting from early December. Lyric books and Christmas costumes are ditched for recycled instruments and made up lyrics. From the *a-brim-bram-brooms* to the *jinggom bells*, caroling is a sure mark that Christmas is coming.



7. Attending Misa de Gallo on Christmas Eve

Regular Sunday masses follow a routine, but everything is extra special on Christmas. The Christmas mass that most Filipinos attend, *Misa de Gallo*, differs from regular Sunday mass. It's a celebration that includes lighting candles, projector displays, and sometimes a re-enactment of the story of how baby Jesus was born

Misa de Gallo is also the first mass after the 9 days of *Simbang Gabi*. It is believed that if you go to all 9 days of *Simbang Gabi*, you can make a wish during *Misa de Gallo*.



8. Waking up for Noche Buena

Most people eat their Christmas dinner either on Christmas Eve or Christmas night, but Filipinos often wake up at midnight to welcome Christmas day with *Noche Buena*, a lavish feast of traditional Filipino Christmas dishes like *lechon*, *queso de bola*, *hamon*, spaghetti, and fruit salad.



A JOLLY CHRISTMAS
from **FRANK SINATRA**



9. Manito-Manita

Exchanging gifts the straightforward way is kind of boring, so we put a Filipino twist on it. Not only do you have to find the perfect present for your *manita* or *manito*, you also have to describe them, have everyone guess who it is, and sing the classic *I Love My Manita/Manito Yes I Do* song before giving your gift.

It sounds like a lot of work, but 'tis the season of giving, and it's a joy to see how happy everyone gets from all their gifts.



10. Awaiting Pamasko

This is for the kids who are on the lookout for their *ninangs* and *ninongs* all season long. Gifts are fun to unwrap, but receiving a red envelope is just as exciting. Gifted by godparents to their godchildren, the money in these *ang pao* often go to savings, or a nice treat for yourself for the Christmas season. Whether you receive P20s, or the big blue ones, we should never forget to be grateful.



To Dede Ivan

To Yana Pot

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福

From Ninang Ika

To Tita

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11. Waking up for Media Noche

Christmas doesn't end on the 25th for us Filipinos. While most welcome the new year by partying it up with friends, our family-centric culture observes one more lavish feast – *Media Noche*. The table is usually adorned with food formed into round shapes and an assortment of 12 round fruits, since circles are believed to bring in good fortune.

Aside from that, there's also the belief that loud sounds will keep the bad spirits from entering the new year, so we make as much noise as possible when the clock strikes midnight – be it with car alarms, instruments, a *torotot*, or sparklers and firecrackers.



12. Ending Christmas in January with the Feast of the Three Kings

Even our priests say Christmas isn't over until January. The Feast of the Three Kings, or the Epiphany, is the celebration of the day the Three Kings reached Jesus' manger. It's also considered the last day of our lengthy Christmas season. Epiphany occurs on the first Sunday of January, which means Christmas continues until well into the new year.

