

Generations

Unique American Christmas celebrations

Christmas is fast approaching and people from all over America are getting ready to celebrate the holiday in their own special way.

An article by Alex Daniel on www.msn.com pointed out a few cities that have a mighty special way of welcoming the holiday.

The city of Boston kept to its tradition of holding its "Ugly Sweater Run" on Dec. 9, during which runners, sporting the most creative holiday sweaters possible ran the 5K with proceeds from the entry fees going to www.onewarmcoat.org.

This amazing charity has been collecting and distributing coats since 1992 with the "Ugly Sweater Run" as one of its most beneficial endeavors. The organization has hosted 31,000 coat drives for organizations and groups willing to help keep families warm by supplying coats, and has given away 5.6 million coats to people in need across the U.S. and in 10 countries.

Jumping next to food, no doubt the DeMarco clan will hunker down with a Butterball, spiral ham or baked ziti for holiday dinner, but Minnesotans of Scandinavian descent are just as likely to whip up an odd seafood

dish: codfish preserved in lye, known as lutefisk.



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According to the Smithsonian, "The lutefisk dinner is an annual fall and winter tradition at Lutheran churches and Nordic fraternal groups throughout the Upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest or anywhere with a large Scandinavian-American population." The children of immigrants celebrate a tradition that connects them to their ancestral home.

However, if you happen to be living or visiting Cajun country, according to "Visit Mississippi," "for quite a few Mississippi families under a Cajun influence, no Christmas Eve is complete without a big pot of gumbo. Made with chicken, sausage and/or seafood, gumbo warms up any holiday gathering." Shrimp and grits are also a mainstay of the Christmas table.

Each year, the city of Reno, Nevada, through the May Arboretum Society, invites architects of sweets to take part in an annual gingerbread house compe-

tion, submitting houses made of edible material, 75 percent of which is gingerbread (though battery-powered lights are acceptable).

The deadline has passed for this year to sign up, but you can read more about it on www.mayarboretumsociety.org.

And during the holidays each year, the state capitol building in Pierre, South Dakota, becomes the site of "Pie Day," where visitors can come by for a free slice of pie.

For those interested in nature, particularly our feathered friends, the Audubon Society is holding its 119th Christmas Bird Count between Friday, Dec. 14 and Saturday, Jan. 5.

You can sign up on www.audubon.org to join in the task of conducting a census of the birds you see in a 15-mile radius and report your results back to the organization. The website features a map of the U.S. that shows counting areas, and there are counting areas in Asheville and Charlotte for local readers.

The idea was launched as a response to the Christmas hunts that were popular during the turn of the 20th century and more than almost 77,000 people

participated last year.

Looking for something unique to do with the kids? In Camden, New Jersey, families visiting the Adventure Aquarium from now until Dec. 30, can watch Santa underwater, clad in a full red robe and hat with scuba gear strapped to his back.

The aquarium features the world's tallest underwater Christmas tree and holds shower dance parties, and children can share their wishes with Santa by dropping their personalized letters in a special underwater mailbox in a 760,000-gallon tank. You can check the program out at www.adventureaquarium.com.

Residents of Mobile, Alabama, skip the Santa outfits and dress up like his workers, with thousands gathering at the Mobile Convention Center for the annual "Elfapalooza." Participants sing Christmas Karaoke, watch the Christmas movie "Elf," and sip hot chocolate, beer, wine, while aiming to beat the Guinness Book of World's Records' challenge for "most Santa's elves in a single location."

And for Christmas carols played with a unique musical sound and interpretation, the

Kansas City Symphony, based in Kansas City, Missouri, each year hosts Tuba Christmas, a massive (sometimes more than 500 instrumentalists) gathering of tuba and euphonium players of all generations and skill levels (www.kcsymphony.org).

The city of Christmas, Florida, has a tough name to live up to, but they do the best job possible with lit up palm trees all year-round and a post office that postmarks letters with a special stamp featuring Santa.

And each December, the Crested Butte Mountain Resort in the city of Crested Butte, Colorado, invites hundreds of people clad in Santa suits to take part in the Santa Ski and Crawl, a wintry event featuring snowboarding, snow-blading and, of course, skiing down the mountain — all in an effort to beat their own record from the previous year (www.skicb.com/event/santa-ski-and-crawl).

Five hundred red-clad Santas skiing or snowboarding down a mountain? Now, that would be a sight one might never forget.

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