

Holland

Farmers in Holland blow long horns at sunset each evening during the Christmas period. The horns are blown over water wells which makes the sound extremely loud. This is done to announce the coming of Christmas.



On December 5, **Sinterklaas Eve** (St. Nicholas Eve) Dutch children leave clogs or shoes out to be filled with presents.

They also believe that if they some

hay and carrots in their shoes for Sinter Klaas' horse, they will be left some sweets.

For most children in Holland, the most important day during the Christmas celebrations is December 6, **St. Nicholas' Day**. On the morning of St. Nicholas' Day, **Sinter Klaas** travels to Amsterdam in a boat, dressed in red Bishop's robes. Many people go to Amsterdam docks to greet him. Sinter Klaas is accompanied by his helper, **Zwarte Piet** (or **Black Peter**). Piet wears Spanish clothes. It is said that the pair live most of the year preparing lists of presents and writing every child's behavior in a very large book.

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When Sinter Klaas and Piet come ashore from the boat, all of the local church bells ring in celebration. Sinter Klaas then leads a procession through Amsterdam, riding a white snow horse, to meet the Queen of Amsterdam in the Palace.

Children are told that Piet keeps a record of all the things they have done in the past year in a book and that good children will get presents from Sinter Klaas, but bad children will get chased by Piet with a stick! Dutch tradition says that he lives in Madrid, Spain and every year he chooses a different harbor to arrive in Holland, so as many children as possible get a chance to see him. Every town in Holland has a few Sinter Klaas helpers, dressed the same as Sinter Klaas who help give the presents out.

Sinter Klaas parties are often held on St. Nicholas Eve, where treasure hunt games are played with poems and riddles giving the clues. Children follow the clues to find little presents left by Sinter Klaas. Special biscuits and sweets are also eaten at the party. One type of biscuit is called **letter blanket** or **letter cake**, which is made from marzipan or pastry. The biscuits are made in the shapes of the first letter of the peoples' names who are at the party. Another sweet biscuit that is eaten at the parties is **pepernoot** which is made with cinnamon and spices in the pastry biscuit mix. Children also like **kerstkrans**, a **Dutch Christmas Ring Cake**.



Kerstkrans



pepernoot

Surprise presents are also given on St. Nicholas Day. This is a custom at the Sinter Klaas parties and often within classes at schools. The custom is that everyone's name is put into a hat and everyone picks another person's name. Then they have to make a surprise present for that person. The presents are often things that the person would find useful with their favorite hobby. The presents come with a poem inside that gives a clue to who might have sent the present, but it is all meant to be a mystery!

On Christmas Eve night, Dutch Children believe that **Santa Claus**, (who is also called "**Christmas Man**") to avoid confusion with Sinter Klaas) comes from Lapland, Finland to deliver small gifts. Christmas Day itself is a much quieter day in Holland, with a Church Service and family meal. Sometimes there is a special Christmas Day "Sunday School" in the afternoon at the church, where the Christmas Story and other traditional stories are told. Usually, Santa Claus will leave the children a book, an orange and biscuits. These are often the only presents children will get on Christmas Day because they have already

received most of their presents on St. Nicholas Day!

In Dutch, “Happy/Merry Christmas” is “**Prettige Kerstfeest.**”

Resources:

Australian Media Pty Ltd. Santa's Net. “Christmas in Holland”. <http://www.santas.net/dutchchristmas.htm>

Why Christmas? “Christmas in Holland”. <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/holland.shtml>