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TREE FACTS

Holiday traditions from around the world are filled with fascinating folklore and culturally rich celebrations. From a Santa Claus-like witch that delivers presents while flying on a broom, to a tree decorated in cookies, below are facts that detail the stories behind the décor of some of the trees and displays that make up this year's *Christmas Around the World* and *Holidays of Light* exhibits. For a full list of tree and display descriptions, visit www.msichicago.org/holiday.

Assyria – “Edokun breekha”

Assyrians come from modern-day Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. Despite displacement, there is a thriving culture in which traditions and language have been passed down over thousands of years. This tree features themes of brotherhood, with photos of children that represent *khigga*, a folk dance in which people form a line by holding hands. The person in front of each line dance is holding a *yalikhta*, a piece of cloth decorated with coins for good luck. The tree also features *lamassu* or winged bulls that used to guard the gates of ancient Assyria, the national flag, the Mesopotamian flower, and the Assyrian (or neo-Aramaic) alphabet.

Australia – “Merry Christmas”

Summer is in full swing during Christmastime in Australia! Santa is often depicted wearing shorts and flip flops, and he is known to ditch his sleigh in favor of a firetruck. On this tree, you'll find home-made paperchains, decorations representing native Australian fauna and flora (including sheep and even a koala), and a cricket bat to represent the country's favorite national pastime. Plus, several ornaments are created by indigenous Australian artists which reflect the multicultural nature of the country.

Belgium – “Joyeux Noël” (French), “Vrolijk Kerstfeest” (Dutch), “Fröhliche Weihnachten” (German)

Each year, this tree features a mix of ornaments that one might find on a Belgian family's tree along with other items that represent Belgium, such as waffle ornaments and pictures of the king and queen. Families enjoy baking—and eating!—*speculoos* (spiced cookies shaped like St. Nicholas) and *buche de Noël* (a yule log cake).

Bolivia – “Feliz Navidad”

A local family has decorated this tree for the past 12 years with 160 artfully handmade traditional ornaments gathered during trips back to Bolivia. The ornaments come from the three main regions of the country—high plains, low plains and the valleys—and include llamas; red, yellow and green totora boats; and native Cholita dolls that represent the city of La Paz.

China – “Seng Dan Fai Lok”, 聖誕快樂

This tree's paper origami ornaments and lanterns were made by a local Girl Scout troop. These adornments showcase the special art of paper folding, which is a tradition during the holiday season. This art has been passed on for centuries and provides unity among the young and old as way to decorate for special holidays. The lanterns represent light,

leading the way to brighter horizons. Lanterns are historically created for China's Lantern Festival, which typically takes place in February or March.

Croatia – “Sretan Božić”

Beautiful ornaments made out of cookie dough decorate the Croatian tree. Traditionally, these ornaments are given to kids to eat as they are baked and decorated each year for the holiday. The ornaments will be conserved for years to come, and each one represents a different region of Croatia.

Czech Republic – “Veselé Vánoce”

The Czech tree has been a part of *Christmas Around the World* since 1942. It is decorated entirely with traditional Czech gingerbread ornaments alongside candle lights. Each gingerbread ornament is handmade and decorated with traditional folk designs—symbols of good health, good fortune and happy hearts. St. Nicholas Eve is celebrated December 5, when the saint—accompanied by both a good and bad angel—visits children, bringing gifts to those who have behaved well.

India – “Shubh Naya Baras”

This tree features traditional ornaments reflecting Indian culture. India's Christian community celebrates Christmas by attending midnight mass and decorating their homes with ornate nativity scenes, lights and clay lamps perched atop their roofs. Many Indians also hang a star on the front of their homes until January 6, Three Kings Day. Another holiday celebrated by Hindus across India is Diwali. The five-day festival of lights honors the goddess *Lakshmi*. The date changes every year based on the lunar calendar: October 19 in 2017 and November 7 in 2018.

Italy – “Buon Natale”

La Befana is the female Italian equivalent of Santa Claus. She is an elderly, witchlike woman who flies above the country on a broomstick, giving gifts to children on January 6 (Epiphany). Legend tells that *La Befana* declined an invitation from the wise men to join them in Bethlehem, and to this day and for all eternity, she continues to search for the baby Jesus. The ornaments on this tree reflect the colors of the Italian flag, the colors of the holiday season, and various religious symbols of Christmas.

Mexico – “Feliz Navidad”

To represent a beloved tradition across the country of Mexico, this tree features a La Lotería theme. Similar to bingo, La Lotería is a game of chance that uses images on decks of cards for players to fill out their *tabla*, or playing board. The first to get four pictures in a row on their *tabla* shouts *¡Lotería!* (Lottery!) or *¡Buenas!* (Good!) and is the winner. The tree is also decorated with *papel picado* (perforated paper), a traditional Mexican folk art that is handmade with colored tissue paper using small chisels.

Nigeria – “Barka dà Kirsimati” “E ku odun, e ku iye'dun” or “Jabbama be salla Kirismati”

Adorned with traditional holiday decorations, this tree represents the Nigerian community as a whole highlighting many of their different tribal origin groups. You'll see beautiful handmade ornament featuring Nigerian lace fabric and wax cloth, as well as garland created from black-eyed peas colored deep-red and orange to symbolize the colors of jewelry worn at Yoruba and Benin celebrations. Additional decorations highlight the rich family customs shared by all Nigerian people at Christmastime.

Philippines – “Maligayang Pasko”

All of the decorations on the tree are from the Philippines, and most have been crafted by hand. Many are made with pineapple fiber, capiz shells, bamboo and leaves from tropical trees. The ornamental stars replicate a *paról*, or a star-shaped lantern made with bamboo and paper that adorn homes throughout the country. This star represents the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Three Kings to the manger, in addition to the victory of light over darkness, much like the Filipinos' hope and goodwill during the holiday season. Christmas in the Philippines is celebrated as early as September and lasts through January. The country has earned the distinction of celebrating the world's longest Christmas season.

Serbia (crèche) – “Mir Bozji, Hristos se Rodi”

The Serbian crèche displays items representing Serbian Orthodox Holiday traditions, like holy icons, customary straw weavings, candles, wheat grains, decorated festal bread, oak branches and costume pieces. Serbian holiday traditions begin with St. Nicholas Day on December 19, when children receive gifts in their shoes set out the night before. Wheat grains are planted in a dish, and however much it has grown by Christmas represents the bounty that is to come the coming year. Christmas is celebrated on January 7, and Serbians distribute straw around the home to represent where Christ was born.

Thailand – “Suk San Wan Christmas”

Less than five percent of Thai people are Christian, so Christmas is not a common celebration. However, with Western influence, children may dress in Santa costumes, sing, dance and play holiday party games. The Thai New Year (*Songkran*) in April is a more widely celebrated holiday. Thai culture is represented on this tree with classical dance symbols, Thai silk and crafts, musical instruments, and fruits.

Ukraine – “Chrystos Razhdayetsya”

The silver spiders that hang on the tree represent a Ukrainian folk tale. A poor family had no decorations for their Christmas tree, so while the children were sleeping, spiders spun webs of silver around its branches. When the family awoke Christmas morning, the tree was sparkling with silver webs. The spider web ornaments are all handmade using traditional Ukrainian embroidery patterns. To this day, a spider web found in the home on Christmas is a sign of good luck.

United States of America – “Merry Christmas”

Most of the ornaments on the tree have been handmade by members of the Friends of the USA Tree, who reside in Illinois, Michigan, Texas and New Hampshire. The eagle tree-topper was made to look as though it is landing on the tree, and it was constructed from 125 pieces of wood from four different types of trees. The large stockings are hand-quilted. All the star boxes are decorated with scenes depicting Christmas memories and some honor the United States military. The crocheted snowflakes are all different sizes, and no two patterns are alike.