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## TREE FACTS

Holiday traditions from around the world are filled with fascinating folklore and culturally rich celebrations. From a tree decorated with leaves from tropical trees and bamboo to another with gingerbread, 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](http://www.msichicago.org/holiday).

### **Belize - “Merry Christmas”**

This tree displays wooden doves, painted white to symbolize peace. The country's maritime culture is represented through handmade wooden boat ornaments. Other ornaments include Belize-grown dried flowers, which resemble acorns, and handmade dolls. For the nine evenings of Las Posadas (celebrated by Mestizo culture), statues of Mary and Joseph are carried throughout town, from home to home, accompanied by music, dance, fireworks and other festivities. In Garifuna culture, the Charikanari dance interprets the relationship of a bull and a hunter with elaborate costumes, fun and games. Creole communities in Belize celebrate the Bram, a parade of dancing, singing and music-making throughout the countryside.

This tree was decorated by the Richards Family, Harris Family and Fant Family

### **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.

This tree was decorated by the Chinese American Civic Council of Chicago.

### **Czech Republic - “Veselé Vánoce”**

The Czech tree has been a part of Christmas Around the World since 1942. It is decorated with traditional hand decorated gingerbread (perník) and hand-blown glass ornaments from the Czech Republic. Gingerbread is used to celebrate many occasions especially Christmas. Glass ornaments are handmade and are treasured additions to a Czech Christmas tree. 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. On Christmas Eve, families gather to enjoy a feast featuring baked carp and kuba (a barley, mushroom and onion casserole).

This tree was decorated by the Moravian Cultural Society.

### **Denmark - “Glædelig Jul”**

The Danish tree is adorned with traditional dolls, flags, angels, hearts, muffs and more! The celebration in Denmark begins with Advent, taking place four weeks before Christmas. A wreath crown is decorated with four candles, one lit each of the four Sundays before Christmas. On Christmas Eve, a traditional Danish feast includes roast goose and rice pudding in which an almond is hidden. The person who finds the almond receives a gift.

This tree was decorated by the Danish Brotherhood in America #35.

### **Egypt - "Nofri Shai" (Coptic), "Eid Sa'id" (Arabic), "Merry Christmas"**

In accordance with the Coptic calendar, the Copts (Egyptian Christians) observe Advent for 43 days prior to Christmas and celebrate the holiday on January 7. During this time, they fast from all meals for a certain period of the day then restrict to a vegan diet. As Christmas approaches, trees and homes are decorated with lights and ornaments, and new outfits are purchased for both children and adults alike. On Christmas Eve, Copts attend a midnight mass, then gather together after the service in their homes and feast together in celebration.

This tree was decorated by the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Chicago.

### **Estonia - "Haid Joule Ja Head Uut Aastat"**

As part of the Song and Dance Festival, which takes place in Estonian capital Tallinn once every five years, most of the 20,000 singers and 7,000 folk dancers wear national dress. This is the largest event featuring Estonian national costumes. To represent this proud tradition, small dolls in costumes decorate the Estonian tree. The garlands are ceremonial belts that are a key part of the national costume and are specific to each region. Small, woven snowflakes and festive handmade children's mittens represent "hand arts," a longstanding custom for women in Estonia. The shields are the official symbols from each county in Estonia. Snowflakes and icicles also adorn the tree in honor of the cold northern European climate.

This tree was decorated by the Aavik-Dawson Family.

### **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, beautifully colored 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.

This tree was decorated by the Fil-Am Halo-Halo, and FADA Alumnae: the Quinol, Greene, Romano, Halaska, Dayco and Mirza families

### **Kenya - "Krismasi Njema"**

The ornaments on the Kenyan tree represent traditional Kenyan toys for boys and girls. This includes, musical instruments, dolls, cars, cycles, and balls for sports in Kenya (football—which the United States is called soccer—rugby and golf). The clothing of the

dolls reflect traditional Kenyan clothing and the handmade vehicles reflect the materials from Kenya. In Kenya, Christmastime includes large family gatherings, feasts and travel to the rural areas or family villages. December is also a popular time for weddings.

This tree was decorated by Team Kenya.

**Mexico – “Feliz Navidad”**

México has a very rich, colorful and varied culture, and the music, food, dances, clothing is different in every region of México. To honor this, Chicago Día de los Niños (CDDLN) and Edwards Elementary School created the ornaments on this tree as a way to share the Christmas traditions and cultures from all 31 states in Mexico and the Federal District. Some symbols you may see include a scorpion, which represents the state of Durango, and delicious mole (hot chiles and rich chocolate sauce) for which the state of Puebla is known.

This tree is decorated by the Chicago Día de los Niños (CDDLN).

**Switzerland - “Fröhliche Weihnachten” (German), “Joyeux Noël” (French), “Buon Natale” (Italian)**

Switzerland is a diverse country, with its population speaking German, French, Italian and Romansh. Customs and decorations may vary from one region to the next. Many Swiss trees feature handmade ornaments. The tree is also decorated on Christmas Eve, which is a joyful family celebration. Traditional décor on this Swiss tree includes hand-blown glass ornaments from Swiss shop Glasi Hergiswil, candles, tinsel and lights. Wrapped gifts are placed underneath the tree, as is a crèche featuring little figurines from the Nativity scene.

This tree was decorated by the Swiss Club of Chicago.