

TREE FACTS

Holiday traditions from around the world are filled with fascinating folklore and culturally rich celebrations. Below are some highlights of this year's participating trees and displays. Visit www.msichicago.org/holiday for a full list.

Assyria — “Eedokun Breekha”

Decorated by “Motwa,” the Assyrian National Council of Illinois

Assyrians come from modern-day Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. Many Assyrians are born outside of their ancestral homeland, and as they are raised in different countries there is growing concerns that their traditions and connections as immigrants will fade away over time. Yet, despite displacement, they maintain a thriving culture in which traditions and language have been passed down over thousands of years. Chicago has one of the largest populations of Assyrian people around the world! This year's tree is intended to bolster a sense of pride in shared Assyrian heritage. You can find decorations that highlight Assyrian language and culture, while also allowing for duality in identities.

China — “Seng Dan Fai Lok,” 聖誕快樂

Decorated by the Chinese American Civic Council of Chicago

This tree's paper origami ornaments and lanterns were made by a local Girl Scout troop; they 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.

Czech Republic — “Veselé Vánoce”

Decorated by the Moravian Cultural Society

The Czech tree has been part of *Christmas Around the World* since 1942. It is adorned with traditional hand-blown glass ornaments from the Czech Republic alongside candle lights. The glass ornaments are individually painted with traditional folk designs and are in various shapes which symbolize good health, good fortune and happy hearts. Saint Nicholas Eve is celebrated December 5, when the Saint—accompanied by both a good angel and a bad angel—visits children, bringing gifts to those who have behaved well. On Christmas Eve, families gather to enjoy a feast of baked carp and kuba (barley and mushroom casserole) along with vánočka (sweet, braided bread with raisins and almonds).

Ecuador — “Feliz Navidad”

Decorated by the Ecuadorian Lions Club

During the Pase del Niño Viajero (festival of the traveling infant child) held in Cuenca, Ecuador on December 24, costumed children parade through town with floats, animals and music. Children also bring gifts of fruit to their neighborhood's nativity scene as offerings to the Christ child. The Ecuadorian tree represents the different regions and styles found throughout Ecuador.

Finland — “Hyvää Joulua”

Decorated by the Finnladies of Chicago

This tree features white snowflake and snowball ornaments and ribbons, and showcases handmade Christmas elves, a traditional holiday decoration in Finland. All Finns know that Santa Claus, also known as Joulupukki, lives in northern Finland near the Arctic Circle—a short jaunt to the homes of good Finnish boys and girls. Christmas dinner is served on December 24, and Santa arrives afterwards while children are still awake, so they have the chance to greet him!

Hungary — “Boldog Karácsonyt”

Decorated by Ildiko Lee and her helpers

In Hungary, painted heart-shaped cookies are a traditional Christmas tree staple, along with colored glass ornaments, Hungarian candy, apples and pears. You can see these represented on this tree in addition to handmade felt ornaments in Hungary’s national colors of red, white and green. Popular Hungarian sweets and chocolates (szaloncukor) are also used as decoration, and underneath the tree are Hungarian dolls. The tree is decorated on the evening of December 24, and kids are not allowed in the room where the tree stands until they have heard a ringing bell. Presents are opened on Christmas Eve.

Kenya — “Krismasi Njema”

Decorated by Team Kenya

The ornaments on the Kenyan tree represent traditional Kenyan toys for boys and girls, including musical instruments, dolls, cars, cycles and balls for popular sports in Kenya like football (called soccer in the United States), rugby and golf. Clothing on dolls reflect traditional Kenyan clothing, and the handmade vehicles reflect 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.

Mexico — “Feliz Navidad”

Decorated by the Chicago Día de los Niños (CDDLN)

This tree is decorated with dolls representing the state of Veracruz, located on the coast of Mexico. Veracruz Vera is known for its regional Son Jarocho music. Female dancers wear white ensembles with a black apron with roses. Male dancers wear white Caribbean outfits with Guayabera shirts. All dancers wear white shoes or boots with heels in order to make rhythmic sounds as they dance to the music of Son Jarocho coplas. Each state in México represents a regional music and dance. Veracruz is known for its Son Jarocho music influenced by Spanish and African musical elements.

Philippines — “Maligayang Pasko”

Decorated by the Fil-Am Halo-Halo and FADA Alumnae: the Quinol, Greene, Romano, Halaska, Dayco and Mirza families

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 manager, 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, making it the world’s longest Christmas season.

Scotland - “Nollaig Chridheil”

Decorated by Thistle and Heather Highland Dancers

On the Scottish tree are traditional symbols of Scottish culture. Tartan is the traditional woven fabric of the country, while other decorations feature golf, highland dance, bagpipes, highland coos (cows), sheep and more. During the 16th century, the Reformation banned Christmas in Scotland, and for some 500 years Scots celebrated New Year’s Day (Hogmanay) instead. However, several Christmas superstitions survived. Bees are believed to leave their hives on Christmas morning. Fires are kept burning on Christmas to keep evil spirits at bay. The morning after Christmas, Scots may look at the fire’s ashes for a footprint. If there is a footprint and it faces the door, a death in the family is foretold; if the footprint faces into the room, a stranger will visit.