

10 Things About London Christmas

1. Secret Santa

Similar to the popular local gift giving tradition of monito-monita, Secret Santa is a different experience when you do it with people from all over the world. Some know how it works and some surprisingly do not. It's amazing how people from different cultural and religious backgrounds openly respond to this sharing tradition.

2. Brussels

Brussels is not just a city in Belgium, but it is also a mainstay of a traditional English Christmas dinner. Commonly referred to as 'sprouts', these leafy greens resemble a minute cabbage. A lot of people find it unpleasant, but for an international student like me, it is worth a try. After all, you can't go wrong with vegetables.

3. Winter Wonderland

One of London's main attractions during this season sits in the heart of Hyde Park. There stands a massive Christmas amusement park that attracts both tourists and locals for some good jolly time. First on your agenda when you visit the park is to try the famous churros, and the best thing about going here is it's free!

4. Christmas crackers

No, I don't mean Sky Flakes or the one you light during New Years' time. Christmas crackers are part of British holiday tradition and are given as a present. Consisting of a cardboard tube wrapped in decorated paper and a prize inside, Christmas crackers are usually pulled on each side by families or friends during Christmas dinners. The treats inside come in different forms—a paper crown, a tiny present and, to top the dinner off, a classic British joke.

5. Advent calendars

For a Christian country like the Philippines, most Filipinos are quite familiar with the Advent wreath with four candles. The Advent calendar, on the other hand, is a fun version of a Christmas countdown. Both children and children at heart count the days before Christmas by opening a box with 24 doors, which is full of chocolates, opened day after day. Apart from anticipating the birthday of Christ, this practice is a rewarding excuse to fill your mouth with scrumptious chocolates for the whole month of December.

6. Mulled wine

This drink is the source of warmth during winter time. Coming from a tropical country, sipping hot red wine served with a squeeze of citrus and mixed with cinnamon sticks

adds on to one's memory bank of Christmas nostalgia. I must say it is indeed quite an experience in a cup and should definitely be on the Christmas shop list.

7. Christmas displays

Being the creative capital of the world, London is home of top fashion brands and shopping centres that never fail to entertain window shoppers with their beautiful displays. For a design student, this is one thing, but for a student on a tight budget, this is one way to feel the season without an expense. Top destinations for these holiday decors would be Liberty, Selfridges and Harrods

8. Christmas jumpers

I remember one of the reasons why children hate Christmas on Jose Rizal's *El Filibusterismo* is because of the stiff clothes their parents ask them to wear. Interestingly, on this side of the planet, kids and adults are fond of wearing comfy and quirky jumpers known for its Christmas motif.

9. Christmas dinner on the 25th

Far from the Filipino-style *Noche Buena*, UK does the yearly family dinner on the 25th. On this day, family members gather, exchange presents and catch-up on the year that was. This special day evokes a very sentimental yet festive mood as most locals head outside London for their holidays. Also as a head start, there is limited to no available public transport service within this day.

10. Global friends

Last but not the least, Christmas is about love and merry-making, and for every international student who is miles away from home, their friends from all over the globe are their families here. Moving to a place like London will make one realise how the definition of home is not just confined within the four corners of one's house but it embraces the edgeless expanse of the planet. Above the learnings and personal developments, a very good network and beautiful friendship are the greatest gifts that a UK education can provide.

To everyone across the globe, Happy Christmas and a blessed New Year!