

Worldwide surprise



"worldwide surprise" is a campaign during the Advent season for children. While combining fun with intercultural learning and development-oriented commitment, the campaign gives children the opportunity to widen their cultural horizons and promote the idea of a more equitable world. The concept of "worldwide surprise" is based on a Christmas custom called 'Wichteln' in Germany, 'Amigo secreto' in Brazil and 'Secret Santa' in America. The campaign gives the custom of exchanging gifts a deeper meaning, especially in a global context. Children in Germany buy presents and cotton hand "Wichtel" puppets at a Fair Trade Shop, which they decorate and exchange in Kindergarten or in Sunday school. The puppets are produced in a fair trade project in India, which supports the physically handicapped women who sew the puppets. By making hand-decorated "Wichtel" puppets, the children in Germany surprise children in other parts of the world. These are then sent to different parts of the world.



There are three possibilities for you to join in and be a part of this campaign.

1. If you have received a package and wish to respond back to the sender.

You could organise a 'Wichtel' session i.e. a handicrafts lesson where the children could use their creative minds and make/draw etc something describing Christmas and life in their city or village. This could range from drawings and paintings, to photos and poems. During the 'Wichtel' session, you could tell the children something about Christmas in the country of the sender, for which materials are attached to this letter. Pack the package with the 'Wichtel surprises' from your group and send it to the sender. If you wish, you could attach an english letter of appreciation.

2. If you already have a partnership abroad and wish to start a 'Wichtel' partnership.

You could organise a 'Wichtel' session i.e. a handicrafts lesson where the children could use their creative minds and make/draw etc something that describes Christmas and life in their city, town or village. This could range from drawings and paintings, to photos and poems. If you wish, you could also design and decorate "Wichtel" hand puppets, which can be ordered for 2,50 Euro under www.worldwide-surprise.org. During the 'Wichtel' session, you could tell the children something about Christmas in Germany or in the country of your respective partner, for which materials are attached to this letter. Pack a package with the 'Wichtel surprises' from your group for the partners abroad. Please do not send food, electrical articles, clothes or toys. Only photos, letters, self-made handicrafts and/or "Wichtel" hand puppets. Please attach a letter in english that explains the campaign and clearly expresses your wish for a reply. A draft can be found under www.worldwide-surprise.com. The exchange can be repeated every year with new aspects.

3. If you wish to start a 'Wichtel' partnership but do not have a partner.

For an address contact: "Worldwide Surprise". After receiving an address follow the instructions found above under point 1.

Worldwide surprise



Christmas customs around the world

Christmas customs in Brazil

It is said that Santa Claus or "Papai Noel" in Brazil comes from Greenland, very far away. Therefore Santa's visit to Brazil is always a big event. Every year he flies in with a helicopter and lands in the "Maracana Stadium", the biggest soccer stadium in the world. There's a big celebration around the stadium. As Brazil is hot during Christmas time, the people decorate everything with flowers. A lot of good food is served like turkey, rice, fresh vegetables and fruits. Almost 90 percent of the Brazilians are catholic. Thus nativity plays about the story of "the Night of Bethlehem" are very popular and are enacted in churches, schools and other public places. Stone pines and palm trees are used as Christmas trees. However children have to wait until midnight after the Holy Mass to get their presents.



Christmas customs in Germany

In the Advent Season almost every home in Germany has an Advent wreath, a wreath of fir or spruce, decorated with four candles, which are lit successively on the four Sundays before December 24th. In the past, people used to light a candle everyday, not only on Sundays. Even before Christianity spread in Europe, people gave each other presents during the midsummer feast. The presents were meant to keep demons away and to sooth the gods, so they would grant mild weather and good crops. The three wise men from the east brought gifts for Jesus too. The custom of giving children presents for Christmas started around three hundred years ago. Polished apples are used as Christmas tree decorations. An old custom says that one should pick an apple, which is half red and half green. The green half symbolises for death, while the red one symbolises new life, which God has given to us on through his son's birth on Christmas day.

Worldwide surprise



Christmas customs in South Africa

For many South Africans Christmas is like a carnival with dance, singing and good food. With the sun and the ocean, people in South Africa like to spend the holidays on the beach. One finds decorated homes, especially the windows with glittering draperies, wool and tin foil. The children hang up their stockings and hope to find it filled with gifts from Father Christmas. Carollers go from house to house singing Christmas carols by candlelight. Others mime Christmas stories, enacting them without saying a single word. On Boxing day - December 26th - crates with food and small gifts are given to the poor. The food is very spicy because a lot of chilli is used to cook it.



Christmas customs in Japan

Although Christians in Japan are a minority, they have adopted some Christmas customs from the United States of America. For example, they now exchange gifts on Christmas. Weeks before Christmas, shop owners decorate their shops with colorful Christmas ornaments. Some even have a Christmas tree in their living room and prepare turkey for their Christmas dinner. The Christmas cake is made out of biscuit with frosted flowers and Christmas trees. The homes are decorated with mistletoes and periwinkles and people sing Christmas Carols. The presents are brought by "Hoteiosho". He is believed to be an old priest carrying a big bag, a little like Saint Nicholas. People say, Hoteiosho has eyes at the back of his head to detect mischievous children. So children always behave properly when he's around.

