

Christmas traditions in Iceland



- The Icelandic flag



We live in a town called Mosfellsbær in Iceland.



Mosfellsbær, Iceland

- We are 11. years old, all in 6th grade.
- 14 girls and 6 boys.
- Our teacher is Guðlaug Ósk

Varmárskóli/Varmárschool

- Varmárschool is one of two schools in Mosfellbær/Mosfellstown and has its own website here is the link <http://varmarskoli.is/Varmarskolikynningenska.html>
- Mosfellsbær is close to our capital Reykjavik and is on the south-west coast of Iceland.
- Our language is Icelandic/Íslenska.
 - Christmas vocabulry icelandic-danish-english
 - Jól-jul-christmas
 - Jólasveinn-julemand-santa claus
 - Jólatré-juletræ-christmastree
 - Jólalög-julesang-christmas songs
 - Gleðileg jól – glædeilig jul – merry christmas



Advent

- Special Advent wreaths are made with 4 candles that are lit each Sunday of Advent to signify the coming of the Christ child.
- The color of Advent is purple.



Kertin

- The first candle is called the **Candle of the Prophet**. It reminds us of the prophecies foretelling the coming of Christ.
- The second candle is the **Bethlehem Candle**, for the town where Jesus was born.
- The third candle is the **Shepherd Candle**, in honor of the shepherds to whom the birth was announced.
- The last candle is the **Angel Candle**, to remind us of the angels who heralded Christ's birth.
- Advent wreaths were unheard of in Iceland before 1930 , but became really popular Christmas decorations between 1960 and 1970 (Advent)

Jólin á íslandi

- One could say that the Icelandic christams lasts for 26 days.
- We count from december the 12th then Stekkjastaur comes to town.
- Stekkjastaur is the first of 12 santa clauses here in Iceland.
- The last santa is Kertasníkir and he arrives on the 24th of december.
- We have 12 santa here in Iceland
- The last day of christmas is january the 6th, we call it þrettándann the 13th day of christmas.

Leafbread



- Iceland used to be very isolated. Everything not grown or raised on the island had to be brought by supply ships from Europe. They were often small and badly prepared for the perilous waters of the Atlantic. In the winter season with its severe weathers, no ships sailed at all. Commodities such as flour, sugar, salt, tobacco and many other things were considered a luxury and the poor could only buy it for special occasions, like Christmas.
- On the farms it was customary for each member of the household to have a special bowl to store food in. Everyone got a weeks ration of food at a time to dispense of at will. It was thought a necessity to serve bread with the Christmas rations, which were always a little bit larger than normally. The poorer households couldn't afford to buy much flour and to make sure that each member of the house got his/her share of bread, the cakes had to be rolled out really thin. In fact, some said that if you could read the Bible through a cake it was thin enough. To make these plain cakes look more festive, patterns were cut into them before they were fried in tallow. There were several traditional patterns but improvisation was allowed. Today, the decorating and frying of leaf bread is a family event and part of the Christmas preparations (laufabraud)



Smákökur

- In most homes are baked coocies, peppercakes up to 10 sorts of coocies most of them with raisins and nuts.



Þorláksmessa

- Þorláksmessa, St. Thorlakur's Day, is named after one of Iceland's three Catholic Saints, Þorlákur bishop of Skálholt who died on this day in 1193 AD. St. Thorlakur has two feast days like other saints, December 23rd and July 20th although the latter is no longer celebrated since Iceland's conversion to Protestantism in the year 1500. St. Thorlakur's Day is the last day of preparations before Christmas. In the old days it was used for cleaning house and household and for cooking the Christmas meal. December 23rd was also the last day of the Christmas fast and some unusual food traditions derived from the fact are still practised and have, if anything, gained popularity in later days.
- In the Western Fjords an old custom of eating cured skate has been the most durable and has spread throughout the country in the last 20 years. Cured skate has a very strong ammonia scent which intensifies when it is boiled and a good dish of cured skate is supposed to make your eyes water. It is served boiled or mashed with potatoes and tallow and one shot of the Icelandic spirit Brennivín for good measure. After the skate has been boiled and consumed it is vital to boil the smoked leg of lamb in the same pot to rid the house, and the pot, of the ammonia stench.
- The trimming of the tree is another St. Thorlakur's Day custom (þorláksmessa)

Christmas gifts and decorations

- In former times it was not common to give or receive gifts at Christmas. Farmers gave their live-in workers one new piece of clothing and new shoes, but this was considered a Christmas bonus rather than a gift. Every home made candles for Christmas, and each member of the household was given one candle. People usually got extra food rations during the season too. Those who were too poor to slaughter a lamb for Christmas ate ptarmigan. Thick porridge with raisins and "leafbread" (thin decorated wheatcakes) were seasonal festive foods. Homes were cleaned from top to bottom and people took their annual baths and washed their clothes for Christmas.
- Christmas decorations were unheard of in Iceland until the late 19th century and then only consisted of twigs decorated with brightly colored paper. The first Icelandic Christmas tree was a tree frame adorned with heather and twigs for no evergreen trees grew in Iceland in those times. The custom of decorating houses did not become popular until around 1940 and was probably due to the arrival of the US Army during World War II.
- gifts and decoration

Hangikjöt



This is called hangikjöt in Icelandic. It is lamb that has been smoked. It is very common that people eat hangikjöt especially at Christmas. It is also very good with flatkökur. (steps integration in Europe <http://atlas.verslo.is/integration/?t=index2005&s=food>)

The Icelandic Yulemen or santa claus

- Nobody knows exactly how the Icelandic Yulemen came into being. They seem to have always been a part of Icelandic tradition. They have always been absolute scoundrels and terrible thieves who scared children. Their parents, the trolls Grýla and Leppalúði, snatched children and ate them. Even the family cat was a monster, ferreting out those who did not get a new item of clothing for Christmas and eating them - or if they were lucky just devouring their Christmas food ration. Stories of these trolls and their brood were so horrible that in 1746 the Danes, who governed Iceland at the time, issued a law to put a stop to the frightening of children with them. Nevertheless, the stories lived on with the people as they have probably done since the time of the Settlement (jolaveinar)

Gryla and Leppalúði

- The yulemen parents they are trolls.
- No Christmas figure is as terrible as Grýla. She is a fierce Icelandic troll best known for her ability to hear naughty children from far away and her nimbleness when catching them and sticking them in her bag. Then she brings them to her cave in the mountains where they end up in her huge pot. Grýla has acquired some terrible descriptions through the ages

(grylaandleppaludi)

The christmas cat.



- The family cat is big and followed those who did not get new clothes before christmas he ate and stole the christmas food.
- We still say that all children have to have new clothes before christmas otherwise they Enn í dag er sagt að öll börn verði að fá nýja flík fyrir jólin annars fari þau í jólaköttinn (jólahúsið)

Yulemen

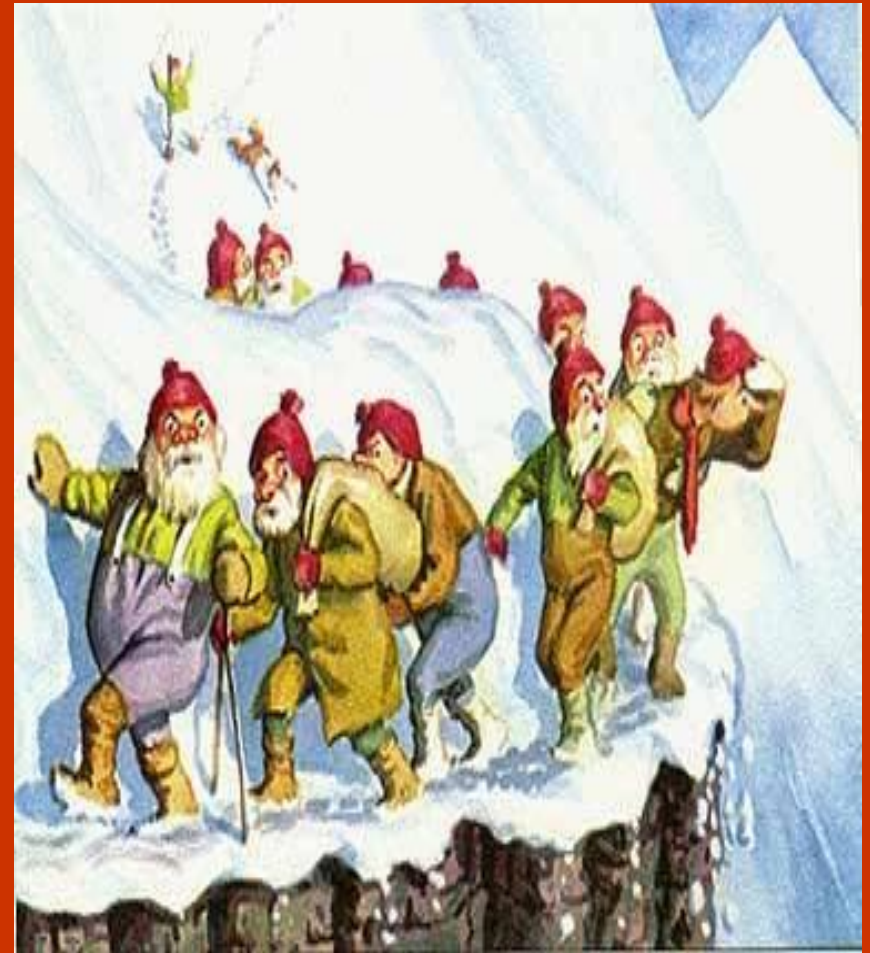
- o begin with the brothers were numerous and their names differed from county to county. Gradually, a few of them became more popular than the rest. The oldest references to the thirteen Yulemen Icelanders know today date from the 16th century. In the middle of the 18th century the brothers began to soften a bit, but were still basically pranksters and thieves. By 1930 the first signs of a new custom had become visible. A few nights before Christmas, children began to put their shoes in the window before going to sleep. This was an echo of St. Nicholas. The Icelandic seamen who sailed to the North Sea countries brought the custom home where it blended with the old Icelandic tales of the Yulemen. By the middle of this century the Yulemen had become so nice that they left a little something in the good children's shoes. By 1970 the custom was fully established. On the evening of December 12th shoes appear in windows all over Iceland because that is the night the first Yuleman comes down from the mountains. They come, one by one, each succeeding night until Christmas Eve when they are all there. yulemen

Að setja skóinn út í glugga

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The Icelandic Yulemen/santa claus

- The first one comes 13 days before christmas or december the 12th.
- The Icelandic children put their shoe in the window if they have behaved well the will get a present every night until the 24th of december. If the have behaved badly they will get a potato.
- It pays to og early to bed when yulemen are in town.
- (picture
<http://www.wilsonsalmnac.com/images2/jolasveinar7.jpg>)



Stekkjastaur /Stiff leg

- Comes to town the 12th of december
- Stiffleg is the first of the santaclauses.
- It was told that he sucked sheepmilk, but he has stiff legs so it didnt go to well.
- Stekkur is a old name of sheep pound and from it the santa has got hes name.



Giljagaur/Gully Gawk

- *Comes to town on the 13th of december.*
- *Gullygawk is the second santa or yulemen.*
- *He hit in the cow-house and took the foam of the milk bucket when no one saw.*
- *In old sayings he is called foamlicker.*



Stúfur/Stump

- Comes to town on the 14th of december.
- Stump is the third in the row of the Santa Claus and at the same time saw smallest, like the name says. Him was reputed steal penny and take left over wick burned stuck on the saucepan presumably are because Pönnusleikir and Pönnuskuggi in the old source same claus and



Ladle Licker

- *Ladle licker is number 4. he comes to town on the 15th of december.*
- So thin he resembles the ladles which he licks the food from



Pot Scraper

- Pot Scraper is number 5 he comes to town on the 16th of december.
- Snatches the unwashed pots from the kitchen and scrapes the insides with his fingers and tongue and leaves them quite clean.



Askasleikir/Ladle Licker

- Ladle licker is number 6. of the santa or yulemen he comes to town on the 17th of december.
- In the old days when people ate out of small wooden box called askur in Icelandic, he hid under the beds and when everyone had fallen to sleep he came out and ate the rest.
- When the wooden boxes were laid out for cats and dogs, Ladle licker was there first and cleaned all food out of.



Hurðaskellir/Door slammer

- *Door slammer is the seventh and comes to town on the 18th of december.*
- He likes to slam doors.
- And he slams every door he sees hard.



Skýrgámur/Skyr gobbler

- *Skýr gobbler is number 8, and he comes to town on the 19th of december.*
- Big man who loves skyr.
- what is skyr?



Bjúgnakrækir/Sausage Snatcher,

- Sausage Snatcher, is number 9 and comes to town on the 20th of december..
- He loves to climb and he loves sausages, and most of all horse sausages and he is always hungry.



Gluggagægir/Window Peeper

- *Window peeper is number 10 who comes to wown. He comes to town on the 21st of december.*
- He peeps in every window he sees.

(picture: <http://www.klappir.akureyri.is/myndir/Gluggagarir.gi>)



Gáttapefur/Sniffer

- On the 22 of december you can expect Sniffer.
- He has a big nose, and he likes the smell of leafbread and coocies.
- Sniffer is number 11 of the Yulemen.

(picture:<http://blog.snaefell.de/2005/12/22/gttaefur-trschlitzschnffler>)



Ketkrókur/Meat Hook

- Is number 12, so he is close to being the last of the yulemen.
- He loves meat and he steals meat and Icelandic meat soup from those who own and he doesn't give the.
- Meat hook comes to town on the 23th of



Kertasníkír/Candle Beggar

- Candle Beggar is number 13 he comes to town on 24th of december and he is the last one of the yulemen. He comes on christmas night.
- He loves candles, he likes them so much that he eats them.
- He likes the candle lights.
- In the old days he was called candlelicker because he licked the candles. Nobody knows if he does so now.



Christmas day

- Christmas day, the 24th of december.
- Many have that tradition to go to the cemetery that day, light a candle and put flowers on the graves of their loved ones.



Christmas eve

- At 6. we ring in the christmas and in most homes the family eats christmas dinner together with their loved ones and wish each other merry christmas.
- After dinner we open our christmas gifts.



The thirteenth day of christmas

- Our folktales say that the last yuleman goes home on the 6th day of januari, and that is Candle begger.
- Old song.

Then thet went away,
-the cold and the snow took
On the thirteenth the last
Boy went.

The thirteenth celebration

- The "thirteenth" day of Christmas marks the end of Christmas.
- Celebrated in latter years with bonfires and Elve dances. Many of the magical occurrences associated with New Year's Eve are also supposed to occur on Þrettándinn
- By this day, pretty much everything is back to normal; everyone is back at work and schools have started. In the evening of this day, families usually get together, have dinner, maybe light the remainder of their fireworks from New Year's Eve and bid farewell to Christmas.



Two christmas nights

- This story happens in a farm where all the people had gone to church on Christmas night, except one maid which was home alone and watched the house.
- When she had finished her chores, she sat on her bed, lit a candle and began to read a book.
- In a short time two children came in to the room and played for awhile, at last they put their hand in the maids lap, but she took her candle and cut it in three pieces and gave each child and had one her self. Then she smiled and ran happy away.
- In a short time a man in a dress came in to the room, he greeted her warmly and wanted her to be his, but she wouldn't and then he went away.
- Next came a woman to her, she greeted the maid and thanked her for her children.
- She took out red cloth and said that she wanted to give it to the maid, she wanted to thank her for her children and how she handled the man. After that the woman went away.
- When the people came home from church the housewife saw the red cloth and envied the maid much. The housewife asked how she had got it, but the maid wouldn't tell.
- Next Christmas the housewife was home when all the people went to church. When she had finished her chores she sat on her bed with candle and began to read.
- Then the children came as before and played, but when they put their hands in the housewives lap she hit them and the children ran crying away.
- Then the dress man came and he greeted her warmly and she decided that he must have given the maid the cloth and treated him kindly. Then he went away.
- Then the woman came and took her right hand and said that she had hit her children, and that she had taken her husband for granted. Then she put a spell on the housewife and said that she would never be the same and then she went away, but the woman lost all her strength in her right arm.
- (Þjóðsagnasafn Jóns Árnasonar/fol tales Jón Árnason)

Interesting websites

- information about christmas in Iceland <http://www.simnet.is/gardarj/yule3.htm>
- Information about christma in Iceland <http://www.cvc.org/christmas/iceland.htm>
- Icelandic folktales <http://www.isholf.is/gardarj/folk/folk.htm>



Christmas in Iceland

Merry cristmas
6. GÓG Varmárskóla
Mosfellbæ
Iceland

Teacher : Guðlaug Ósk Gunnarsdóttir

