Christmas in Germany

Germany is well known for its Christmas Markets where all sorts of Christmas foods and decorations are sold. Perhaps the most famous German decorations are glass ornaments. The glass ornaments were originally hand blown glass and were imported to the USA in the 1880s by the Woolworth stores. The legend of the glass “Christmas Pickle” is famous in the USA, but it’s that, a legend. Most people in Germany have never heard of the Christmas Pickle!

A big part of the Christmas celebration in Germany is Advent. Advent is the period of four Sundays and weeks before Christmas (or sometime from December 1 to Christmas Day). This is the coming of Jesus into the world. Advent is intended to be a season of preparation for His arrival.

There are several ways that Advent is counted down, but the most common is by a calendar or candles. Some European countries such as Germany use a wreath or fir with twenty-four bags or boxes hanging from it. In each bag or box is a little present for each day. Some people these days go with the paper Adventskalender, which are mostly filled with chocolate treats.

December 6 is St. Nicholas Day and "der Nikolaus" brings some small gifts, such as sweets and chocolate, to the children. He comes in the night between the 5th and the 6th and puts the presents into the shoes of the children, who usually place them by their doors on the previous evening. In some regions of Germany, there is a character called "Knecht Ruprecht" or "Krampus" who accompanies Nikolaus (St. Nicholas) on December 6. He is a big, horned monster clothed in rags and carries a birch. He will punish the children who were bad and will give them a birch as a present. He is usually the one who scares the little children.

The evening of December 6 is when kids in Germany go from door to door dressed up as Nikolaus with a big sack, singing songs and collecting sweets.

Though St. Nicholas and Santa Claus have similar outfits, Nikolaus is not to be confused with Santa Claus, who Germans call the “Weihnachtsmann.”
Christmas Eve (Heiliger Abend) is celebrated in Germany on December 24. Santa Claus comes in the evening and brings the presents. It is the last day of Advent and the start of the Christmas season. Many people spend the afternoon and evening decorating Christmas trees, attending church services, eating traditional dishes, and opening Christmas presents.

In Germany, we have two National Holidays. We celebrate Christmas Day, and we also celebrate December 26 as “the Second Day of Christmas.”