The Christmas Book:

How to Have the Best Christmas Ever

Published by Michael O'Mara

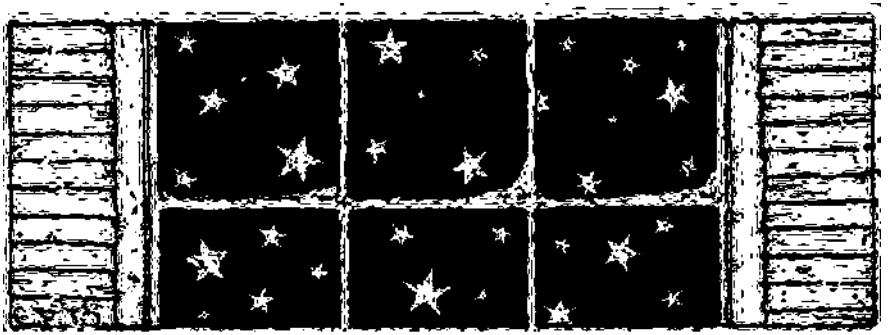
Extract

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The Origins of Christmas Traditions: Carolling 78
Tree Decorations 80
Hangover Cures 83
Reindeer Facts 89
True Christmas Stories: 'Yes, Virginia' 91
Christmas Practical Jokes 94
Hosting a Christmas Party (2) 97
The Origins of Christmas Traditions: the Yule Log 104
Thank You Very Much . . . 105
Fun and Games 106
Present-wrapping Made Easy (2) 112
Christmas Place Names 118
Gift Ideas 119
Edible Gifts 124
The Origins of Christmas Traditions: Holly and Ivy 128
Leftover Turkey 129
Thank You Very Much . . . 133
Let it Snow 134
True Christmas Stories: Bad Santas 136
The Origins of Christmas Traditions: Boxing Day 138
Things to Do on Boxing Day 139
Alternative Christmas Songs Lyrics 141
Top Ten Christmas Movies (2) 143
UK Christmas No. 1 Singles 148
The Origins of Christmas Traditions: Mistletoe 152
A Child's Christmas in Wales 153
Thank You Very Much . . . 154
How to Pretend Christmas Isn't Happening 155
'Merry Christmas' Around the World 157
Acknowledgements 160

Introduction



Christmas is a time for peace on earth and goodwill to all. It is a time for family and friends; sitting in front of a crackling fire; cold, crisp days and fun in the snow; rosy-cheeked children singing carols; the spicy aroma of mulled wine; Christmas trees adorned with twinkling lights . . .

It is also a time for family feuding, overdrafts and angry letters from the bank manager, pretending to like embarrassingly inappropriate gifts, hangovers, turkeys that refuse to defrost, drowning in a mountain of wrapping paper, indigestion, and getting drunk at the office party and snogging the boss.

Whether you're one of life's Scrooges – turning off all the lights and hiding behind the sofa when the carollers come calling, content with an M&S meal-for-one for Christmas lunch, doing all your Christmas shopping at the local pound shop – or whether you throw yourself into the spirit of the season with gusto, a merry 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' escaping from

your lips at every opportunity, we all need a bit of a helping hand at Christmas.

Here you can learn how to have the best Christmas ever without breaking a sweat. How to wrap those awkwardly shaped presents, how to choose and care for a tree, how to cope with cooking a meal large enough to feed a small village for a week, how to keep the family entertained when all there is on the telly is yet another *Only Fools and Horses* rerun – it's all to be found within these pages. Satisfy the anorak in you with our comprehensive lists of must-know Christmas facts, from who held the coveted No.1 spot on the singles charts on any given year, to Christmas Day events throughout history, and impress your friends with your knowledge of the origins of all things Christmassy. Full of jokes, tips, trivia, spoof thank-you letters and tales of rampaging Santas, this book is all you'll need to get you through the ups and downs of the festive season.



Hosting a Christmas Party (1)

So you've decided to throw caution to the wind and host your own Christmas bash, and you want the occasion to be a memorable one. Needless to say, this doesn't involve putting on an old Slade album, laying out some cheese on toothpicks and leaving your guests to fend for themselves. Read on for some great tips on how to make sure your party is the one everybody is talking about this year.

Invitations

If you don't want to spend the evening sitting on your own surrounded by enough food to feed an army for a week, make sure you send your invitations out in good time: at least three weeks before the event is advisable during the busy party season.

Be realistic when it comes to your guest list. How many people can your house comfortably accommodate? There's nothing worse than a room crammed full of hot, sweaty guests all shouting at the tops of their voices to make themselves heard and struggling to get anywhere near a plate of nibbles or bottle of wine. Also, what is your budget? It's better to over-cater for your guests than to leave them wanting more, so if you haven't got that much to spend stick to a more intimate gathering of close friends and family. Be aware that inevitably someone will ring at the last minute to ask whether they can bring their brother/aunt/new boyfriend,



so make allowances for this when deciding on numbers. Ask people to RSVP and include your phone number and/or email address on your invitations. A few days before the party you should contact anyone who hasn't replied to confirm whether they will be attending.

Invite your immediate neighbours. If you don't get on with them, they probably won't come anyway, but they will appreciate the thought and will be less likely to complain about the noise! If you're adamant that you don't want to invite them, at least warn them that you will be hosting a party and apologize in advance for the inconvenience.

It's always better to mail out invitations rather than sending a round-robin email. People will appreciate the extra care taken and are more likely to RSVP if there is a card sitting on their mantelpiece reminding them to do so. If you



do decide to send a group email, send it to yourself and bcc ('blind carbon copy') your guests, so that their inboxes are not suddenly filled up with irritating 'reply to all' messages. Along with the obvious information – date, timings, your address and so on – include directions (if your home is difficult to find), available parking spots, dress code (if any – see below), phone numbers of a couple of local cab firms and perhaps even details of some local hotels for those guests who may need to travel to attend your party.

Themes

Having a theme for your party can be a great ice-breaker and allows you to be creative with your decorations. Fancy dress can be fun, but remember that not everyone enjoys dressing up as a cowboy/vicar/gorilla etc., and you certainly



don't want to force your guests to spend a lot of money hiring costumes. If you do decide on a fancy-dress party, pick a theme that people can dress for easily using bits and bobs they will already have in their wardrobes, such as 70s, Rock 'n' Roll, Roaring Twenties or Gangsters and Molls. Colour themes are a good alternative to fancy dress. How about a Christmassy red and green theme, or glamorous black and white? Or, even simpler, asking everyone to wear a hat can produce some hilarious results!

Preparing your house

Even if you think your guests are the most well-behaved people on the planet, a little bit of Christmas spirit and a lot of the alcoholic variety mean that breakages and spillages are inevitable. You won't enjoy your party if you're constantly worrying about your precious possessions, so pack away that Persian rug and the Meissen tableware and stash them in an off-limits room – you can show them off some other time. Have a dustpan and brush and a few cloths and cleaning materials ready in a handy place so you can quickly deal with any disasters.

If necessary, rearrange your furniture so that people have room to move around and can get down to a bit of boogying if they wish. If you're worried about spillages on your sofas, chuck a few inexpensive throws over them.

Set up a table in the main party room where you can lay out food and drink. One of your jobs as host is to pass these around, but you don't want to be doing that all night long. If you've got the space, it's a good idea to have various plates

of nibbles scattered around the room on small tables so your guests don't have to queue up for a handful of crisps.

If you allow smoking in your home, have plenty of ashtrays laid out in prominent positions if you want to avoid having to deal with a mountain of butts in your plant pots the next day. If you don't allow smoking, put up a sign saying so.

Make up some signs pointing out where the bathroom is, where to leave coats and which rooms are off-limits. Ensure you have plenty of toilet paper, clean hand towels and soap in the bathroom.

Your rubbish bin will fill up quickly. Have a fresh bin liner in it and keep some spares in the bottom of the bin so you don't have to go searching around in cupboards when one gets filled up. Have a couple of large cardboard boxes at the ready somewhere out of the way, which you can fill up with bottles and other recyclables.

Finally, give your house a good clean! You may think that your guests won't notice that dubious-looking ring around your bath once they've had a few drinks, but they will.



Why does Scrooge love Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer?

Because every buck is dear to him.