



MFL Sunderland Primary French Podcasts

intercultural
understanding

Christmas &
New Year in
France

Welcome to the MFL Sunderland Primary French podcast. Intercultural Understanding – Christmas and New Year in France

In this podcast you'll find out how Christmas and the New Year are celebrated in France.

Decorations

At Christmas time French families decorate Christmas trees with baubles and tinsel. The traditional colours are green, to symbolise leaves and hope, red, which represents heat and light, and gold which symbolises the sun. Sweets, nuts, fruits and small toys are also hung on the tree.

Nearly every French household also has a crib, or a Nativity scene. The crib is filled with small clay figures called "santons", or "little saints". The stable scene is represented and the baby Jesus is the last figure to be added on 25th December. The santons are sold at Christmas markets – "marchés de Noël"- during November and December.

Mistletoe – "le gui" – is hung above the door over Christmas to bring good luck for the new year.

December 24th

24th December is "la Veille de Noël" in France. The children put their shoes by the fireplace as that is where Father Christmas leaves the presents. They hope that they will receive what they asked for in their letters. In 1962 a law was passed in France to say that any child who wrote to Father Christmas would receive a reply by postcard. When a whole school class writes a letter, each child gets a reply. These days it is also possible to email Father Christmas, and of course he emails back.

Traditionally, French people attend Midnight Mass on the night of 24th December. After the Mass they return home or go to a restaurant for "le Réveillon", a word which comes from the word "éveil", which means "dawning" or "awakening", and which refers to the birth of Christ. The Réveillon is a huge dinner, and the culinary high point of the season. The food that is eaten depends on the region. It could be turkey, goose, chicken or maybe "boudin blanc" (white pudding). In Paris the traditional food is oysters, and others may eat frogs' legs or snails. For dessert they eat "bûche de Noël", which is chocolate ice-cream or a chocolate cake in the shape of the branch of a tree. This represents the log that used to be burned in a pagan tradition between 24th December and New Year. Another traditional dessert is "pain calendeau", which is eaten especially in the south of France, and part of it is given to the poor.

After the Réveillon, it's traditional to leave a candle burning in case the Virgin Mary should pass by.

New Year's Eve in France is called "la Saint-Sylvestre". It is usually celebrated with another big meal, called "le Réveillon de Saint-Sylvestre". The Réveillon on 24th December is usually celebrated with family, while Saint-Sylvestre is more normally celebrated with friends. When the clock strikes midnight, everyone wishes each other "Bonne Année!" (Happy New Year). They may also share gifts and cards. The President gives his traditional New Year television address.

The festive season ends on 6th January, Epiphany. On this day, a traditional cake called "la galette des rois" is eaten. One of the children is chosen to hand it out and he or she is called "le petit roi" or "l'enfant soleil". Hidden inside one of the pieces will be a "fève" or a favour. The person who has the fève is named the King or Queen and has to choose their consort from those present.

Here is some of the vocabulary that you can use to talk about Christmas in French:

Noël	Christmas
décembre	December
Chrétiens	Christians
non-Chrétiens	non-Christians
Jésus Christ	Jesus Christ
le sapin de Noël	Christmas tree
le vert, le rouge et l'or	green, red and gold
la crèche	crib
la veille de Noël	Christmas Eve
les chaussons	slippers
la messe de minuit	Midnight Mass
des boules de Noël	baubles
des guirlandes	tinsel
la dinde	turkey
les cuisses de grenouille	frogs' legs
les escargots	snails
la bûche de Noël	Christmas log
les cadeaux	presents
les chansons de Noël	Christmas carols
le Jour de Noël	Christmas Day
le Père Noël	Santa Claus

That's the end of this podcast. If you think you need a bit more practice, go back to the beginning and listen again.

Au revoir !