

Christmas in the Netherlands

“Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way. Oh what fun it is to ride in a one horse open sleigh!”

Sinterklaas is on his way to Spain again. The stores have updated their music selection and no longer play those good old Sinterklaas songs, but have switched to Christmas carols. The shelves are stocked with Christmas tree ornaments and candy. But how popular is Christmas really in the Netherlands? Will Santa Claus defeat our beloved Sinterklaas?

Last year 52 percent of the Dutch households celebrated Sinterklaas with gifts instead of Christmas and 68 percent of families with small children chose Sinterklaas over Christmas. There are also remarkable differences between the geographical regions of the Netherlands. In the south and in the west between 41 and 44 percent of the households decided to celebrate Christmas last year. In the east of the Netherlands 31.5 percent chose Christmas over Sinterklaas. Christmas is the least celebrated in the north of the Netherlands – 24.5 percent chose Christmas, while 55.8 percent preferred Sinterklaas celebrations.

Should we be worried Santa Claus (a product of Coca Cola and the vague Sinterklaas memories of American immigrants) is taking over? Should Sinterklaas retire and spend the remainder of his days in sunny Spain? Well, Sinterklaas experts say we shouldn't worry. Santa Claus seemed to be taking over around 2000, but in times like these which are filled with fears of losing a national identity the Dutch are looking for a national symbol. And Sinterklaas seems to be perfect for the job. Experts also say the massive attention for Sinterklaas on television might have something to do with it (Sinterklaas was the star of three television series this year).

Even though people still seem to prefer Sinterklaas over Christmas, there are still enough opportunities to celebrate Christmas in the Netherlands. In addition to the more traditional midnight mass, the decorated trees, gifts, there are lots of fun things to do this year. Leiden is going all out with ice-skating on the Nieuwe Rijn, Christmas fairs and a Moonlight-Shopping night for last-minute gifts. Merry Christmas!



4 December 2009 – 3 January 2010

Ice Skating at the Nieuwe Rijn, Leiden

15 December 2009 – 3 January 2010

Special exhibition “Kerst op het Loo” at Paleis het Loo, Apeldoorn

13 and 20 December 2009

12:00-18:00 – Christmas fair at the Nieuwe Rijn, Leiden

19 and 20 December 2009

11:00-17:00 – Dickens Festival at Deventer with a Christmas fair on 20 December

23 December 2009

Shops open until 23:00 - Moonlight-Shopping

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