CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

INDEX

ST.PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL

THE JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS

A celebration of the German origins of Britain's most-loved Christmas traditions.

The journey of the Christmas tree from Germany into British festive life is just one example of how Christmas traditions travel, evolve and eventually feel completely our own. And it is that connection between Germany and the Christmas Britain knows that sits behind St. Pancras International's 2026 tree.



THE GERMAN STORY BEHIND BRITAIN'S CHRISTMAS

The Christmas tree is one of Britain's best-loved festive traditions.

According to our research, almost two thirds (64%) of Brits will display a Christmas tree this year, while the majority (58%) say that Christmas would simply not feel the same without one.

But look beyond the lights and baubles and its story leads back much further, across the North Sea to Germany.

The modern decorated Christmas tree has strong historical roots in German-speaking Europe, with the tradition arriving in Britain through close cultural and royal connections between Britain and Germany.

German-born Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, is credited with introducing the Christmas tree to the British royal household around 1800. Her tree at Windsor Castle was decorated with candles, fruit and sweets - a festive echo of the Christmas customs she had known growing up in northern Germany.

But it wasn't until almost 50 years later that the tradition captured the national imagination, when an illustration of Queen Victoria, German-born Prince Albert and their children gathered around their decorated tree at Windsor Castle was widely reproduced, helping a German festive custom find its way into British homes.

The decorations may have changed, with candles giving way to fairy lights and fruit and sweets to the baubles and ornaments we know today, but the tree has remained at the centre of Christmas ever since.

So much so that many are unaware of its origins. Today, Brits are more likely to associate the modern decorated Christmas tree with Britain than Germany: just 19% associate it with Germany, compared with 22% who believe it has British origins – suggesting that its German origin story has been lost over time.

A FIRST FOR ST. PANCRAS

For the first time, St. Pancras International has partnered with a travel-by-rail destination for its annual Christmas tree. Working with the German National Tourist Office (GNTO) and Hilton, the station is bringing the traditions, destinations and stories of Germany at Christmas to the heart of London.

Inspired by a traditional German Christmas pyramid, a wooden decoration featuring a tiered carousel with festive figures and candles, the tree is starting London's 2026 Christmas festivities by taking visitors on The Journey to Christmas. At its base are 24 windows, with 16 dedicated to Germany's 16 regions and 8 to festive moments with Hilton. The 3 tiers above showcase German landmarks and destinations, and the Christmas traditions associated with them, bringing the different regions of Germany together within the tree.

The result is more than a Christmas tree. It is an invitation to discover the German stories behind familiar British Christmas traditions and the destinations where many of those traditions can still be experienced today.

THE CHRISTMAS YOU KNOW, THE GERMANY YOU DON'T

Brits celebrate three times as many German-linked traditions than they think

Christmas in Britain is full of traditions we barely have to think about. We put up a tree, open an Advent calendar, make a wreath, hang familiar decorations and repeat the customs our families have celebrated for years.

Yet the stories behind them are often far less familiar.

In fact, this year, nine in ten (89%) Brits will take part in at least one German-linked Christmas tradition, with the average Brit celebrating five traditions that have a German link.

Over generations, many have simply become part of British festive life.

Almost half (46%) admit they follow Christmas traditions without knowing where they originally came from, while nearly two thirds (65%) believe many of the Christmas traditions we think of as "British" actually came from somewhere else.

Some German traditions have become so familiar that we now think of them as British: more Brits associate the modern Christmas tree with Britain (22%) than Germany (19%), while Advent calendars are twice as likely to be believed to originate in Britain (26%) as Germany (13%).

What's more, whilst seven in ten (69%) Brits say that Christmas traditions travel between countries and cultures, the scale of Germany's influence remains unexpected, with more than half (52%) surprised to discover just how many familiar festive traditions have German historical connections.

It is a reminder that the traditions that feel most familiar are often those that have travelled the furthest.





When does the festive season officially start? The Christmas debate dividing Britain.

For some, Christmas can never come too early. For others, December is soon enough.

More than a quarter of Brits (27%) say Christmas officially starts during November, compared with just 5% who wait until Christmas Eve.

But amid the annual debate over when Christmas can officially begin, there's one tradition that tops the list for making the festive season feel officially under way: putting up the Christmas tree.

The moments that make it feel like Christmas has officially begun:

1. Putting up the Christmas tree (20%)
2. Hearing Christmas music (12%)
3. Seeing Christmas lights switched on (10%)
4. Seeing festive adverts (9%)

For one in five Brits, putting up the tree takes the top spot, making it the nation's clearest signal that Christmas has officially arrived.

People are prepared to travel for a magical festive experience: three quarters of Brits (75%) would make a special journey to see a distinctive Christmas tree, Christmas market or other festive landmark.

At St. Pancras International, that journey to Christmas starts with our tree.





BRITAN'S CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS: PASSED DOWN, PICKED UP AND MADE OUR OWN

The traditions that make Christmas feel like Christmas

Christmas traditions remain an important part of the festive season.

Almost four in five Brits (79%) say Christmas traditions are important to making the season feel special. For most people, the traditions they celebrate start at home.

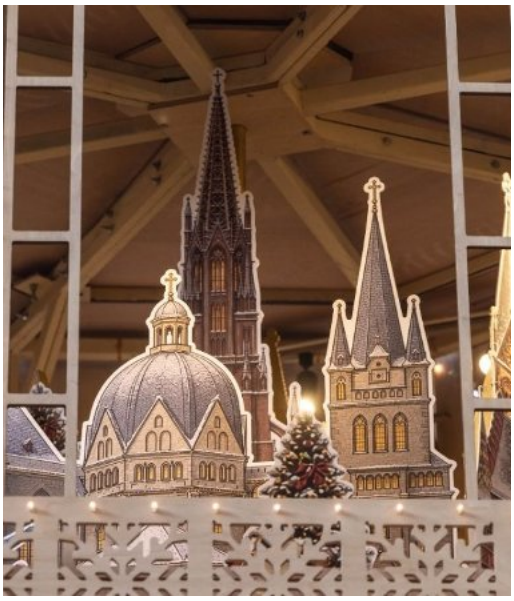
Three in five Brits (60%) say their Christmas traditions have been passed down by their parents, while one in five (20%) say they have created Christmas traditions of their own.

While many traditions are inherited, they are not fixed.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of Brits have adopted a Christmas tradition from another household, country or culture, while two thirds (66%) say something has changed the way they celebrate Christmas.

From one family to another and one country to the next, traditions are borrowed, adapted and made personal, becoming part of the way we celebrate Christmas today.

Knowing the story makes Christmas more meaningful



As traditions are passed down and made our own, their origins can easily be forgotten. But for many, discovering where a familiar Christmas custom came from adds another layer to the celebration.

A majority of Brits (56%) want to know where their Christmas traditions actually came from, while nearly two thirds (65%) say learning the story behind a tradition makes it feel more meaningful.

For some, that curiosity goes beyond the tradition itself. 44% say discovering that a Christmas tradition has roots in another country makes them more interested in visiting that destination.

After learning about the German connections behind familiar Christmas traditions, 72% would be interested in visiting at least one German festive destination or experience.

It is this connection between tradition, discovery and travel that sits at the heart of this year's partnership with the German National Tourist Office, bringing the stories behind Christmas to life at St. Pancras International and inviting visitors to discover more for themselves.

The Sound of Christmas

Despite the multitude of classic and cheesy Christmas hits, from Wham! to White Christmas, traditional carols remain an important part of the British festive season.

Two thirds of UK adults (67%) say traditional carols are important to making it feel like Christmas, compared with 61% for Christmas pop songs.

Silent Night – otherwise known as Stille Nacht – is Britain's best-known traditional Christmas carol, recognised by seven in ten (71%), followed by Away in a Manger (65%) and Deck the Halls (62%).

At St. Pancras International, music already has a home. Its celebrated public pianos have become part of the fabric of the station, bringing together commuters, travellers, visitors and performers, sometimes when they least expect it.

This Christmas, music will once again form part of the Journey to Christmas.



Crafted for Christmas

Germany's festive story can also be found in its craftsmanship.

For generations, artisans have carved and created the wooden decorations now synonymous with a traditional German Christmas - from nutcrackers and candle arches to incense smokers and intricate Christmas pyramids.

Yet many of these traditional decorations remain unfamiliar to British audiences.

More than two thirds (69%) of Brits are unfamiliar with Christmas pyramids. Even the nutcracker, one of Germany's most recognisable festive figures, is unfamiliar to almost a third (32%).

These are traditions built to be passed on: pieces of craftsmanship that bring together light, storytelling and a sense of Christmas wonder.

And this year, one of the grandest of those traditions has inspired the Christmas tree at St. Pancras International itself.

AN ADVENT JOURNEY THROUGH ST. PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL

24 windows. 16 German regions. One Journey to Christmas.

The 2026 St. Pancras International Christmas tree is designed to give visitors something new to discover throughout the festive season.

Inspired by a traditional German Christmas pyramid, the tree features 24 Advent-style windows around its base. Sixteen windows celebrate Germany's 16 regions, bringing their destinations and festive traditions to life, while eight windows feature campaign partner Hilton.

The wider tree design continues the journey above the windows, showcasing German landmarks and destinations across its rotating tiers.

ST. PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL – THE GATEWAY FOR DISCOVERING GERMANY & ITS TRADITIONS

The stories behind Christmas can be discovered at St. Pancras International, and experienced for real in Germany.

From St. Pancras International, travelers can reach Cologne by rail with one change in Brussels. Eurostar's London-to-Cologne journey takes just over four hours overall, with London to Brussels taking around 1 hour 52 minutes before the onward Eurostar connection to Cologne. The entire journey can be booked together, with the change taking place at Brussels-Midi/Zuid.

From Cologne, rail connections open up destinations across Germany, and the chance to experience many of the traditions brought to life through this year's tree.

The wider tree design continues the journey above the windows, showcasing German landmarks and destinations across its rotating tiers.





BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS

The traditions we celebrate at Christmas have been passed down through families, shared between countries and cultures, and made our own over generations.

This Christmas, St. Pancras International invites visitors to discover the German stories behind some of Britain's best-loved traditions – all brought to life through the 2026 Christmas tree.

Visit the St. Pancras International Christmas tree to begin your Christmas journey!