

Christmas CHEER



Suneeta Sodhi Kanga brings you the world's best-loved Christmas drinking traditions. What they all have in common is that they spread good cheer, warmth and merriment

ACROSS the world Christmas is a time for indulgence, especially when it comes to food and wine. The festive season sees us all splashing out on copious bottles of red, white and sparkling wines, in a valiant effort to cater for the masses of friends and family that will be turning up for the big feast on Christmas

Day. There are many rituals and traditions that are observed only at this time of year and festive drinking traditions are no exception. So, while the festive menu may differ depending on country, region or family, there is one thing that remains constant—the guarantee of wine and other traditional drinks at the Christmas table. These heart-warming drinks get everyone feeling merry and spirited. From Europe to the Americas, there are some truly weird and wonderful Christmas drinking traditions. So, in keeping with the spirit of goodwill at Christmas, we have gathered together a selection of our favourites from across the globe.

NORTH AMERICA

Eggnog: This sweet, creamy drink is a favourite

for everyone in the U.S. and Canada, who drink it between Thanksgiving through the end of the Christmas season.

Eggnog seems to have originated from the early medieval Britain posset, a hot, milky, ale-like drink. By the 13th century, monks were known to drink a posset with eggs and figs. Milk, eggs, and sherry were foods of the wealthy, so eggnog was often used in toasts to prosperity and good health.

Since eggnog has charmed drinkers for nearly a millennium here is an easy recipe that you can try at home:

- One quart cream
- One quart milk
- 12 tablespoons sugar
- One pint brandy
- 1/2 pint rye whiskey

MULLED WINE IS ANOTHER OF THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE CHRISTMAS BEVERAGES. EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE THEIR OWN VERSION OF THIS SPICY DRINK

- 1/2 pint Jamaican rum
- 1/4 pint sherry

Mix the liquor first, then separate yolks and whites of eggs. Add sugar to beaten yolks, mix well. Add milk and cream, slowly beating. Beat whites of eggs until stiff and fold slowly into mixture. Set in a cool place for several days. Taste the mixture frequently.

Did you know that the Puerto Ricans also have their own version of eggnog? It's called the Coquito. The main difference is that they use coconut milk and condensed milk instead of just regular milk. You can give that a shot too.

EUROPE

Mulled wine is another of the world's favourite Christmas beverages. Several European countries have their own version of this spicy drink, but they're usually all based on warm wine infused with sugar and spice and everything nice.

FRANCE

In France, *vin chaud* or hot wine typically consists of red wine mixed with honey, cinnamon, and orange. It must not be too sweet and is the favourite beverage for those indulging in winter sports in the Alps.

GERMANY

Strolling past the bustling Christmas stalls in the yuletide markets of Germany, you are guaranteed to find the hot, spice-infused *glühwein* roughly translated as glow-wine. The name comes from the hot irons that were once used for mulling. In Germany you may also be treated to the intriguing drink of *feuerzangenbowle*, a traditional Christmas drink similar to mulled wine or *glühwein*. However, there's a whole procedure to drinking it. The red wine is served in a bowl similar to a fondue set with a burner. Then

a *feuerzange*, a metal grate, is placed on top of the bowl and a *zuckerhut*, sugar hat, is dropped on it. The rum-soaked *zuckerhütchen* is then set alight which slowly caramelises into the bowl of wine. Sounds yum!

SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

In the Nordic countries mulled wine is called *glogg*. It is spelled *gløgg* in Norwegian and Danish, *glögg* in Swedish and Icelandic and *glögi* in Finnish and Estonian. *Gløgg* recipes also vary widely; variations with white wine or sweet wine such as Port or Madeira, or spirits such as brandy or whisky are also popular. *Gløgg* can also be made without alcohol by replacing the wine with fruit or berry juices, often blackcurrant, or by boiling the *gløgg* to evaporate the alcohol. *Gløgg* is similar in taste to modern *wassail* or mulled cider.

U.K.

Wassail, the name of this Christmas drink comes from Old Norse, which was a North Germanic language that was spoken by inhabitants of Scandinavia and inhabitants of their overseas settlements during the medieval ages. It was also called *was hál* in Old English. Early versions of it were made with ale and mead, but nowadays they are essentially the cider or Ale version of mulled wine, with apples in it, and in some recipes, beaten eggs.

ITALY

The tradition of Christmas markets is a must all over Italy as well. As in all of Europe, no visit to one of these markets is complete without a glass of mulled wine or *vinbrulé* as it is called in Italian. It stems from the French *vinbrûlé* or burnt wine, though the expression is not used in France.

Franciacorta, a sparkling wine from the





province of Brescia is a must for a northern Italian Christmas, while Vin Santo is prevalent throughout every Tuscan household at Christmas time.

A little Vin Santo serves as the perfect end to an extravagant Christmas Day Italian feast and is typically paired with a sliver of *panforte*, one of the region's most traditional Christmas desserts.

SPAIN

Cider is not a drink normally associated with Spain but in the green and fertile land of Asturias, it is a staple of any celebration. Asturian cider is made from a range of PDO-classified local apple varieties and is distinctly tart with a hint of sweetness. It is the tradition around the serving of this cider, however, that makes it particularly special for an occasion like Christmas. The cider is poured from a great height, making the cider fizz as it hits the

sides of the glass. And the bubbles don't just stop there. Cava is never far from the top of the Christmas drinks list in Spain, especially in Catalonia.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Ponche Navideño is exactly what it sounds like: Christmas punch. Central Americans love to have some special punch around Christmas time. *Ponche Navideño* is a hot, bubbling fruit salad with some rum in it. Mexicans love to add lots of *tejocotes*, a species of hawthorn (a seasonal fruit), but other countries like to mix it up their own way.

JAMAICA

The Sorrel Punch is relatively similar to other Christmas punches, but with a Jamaican twist in it. Yes, it obviously has rum in it, but what makes this punch stand out is its use of sorrel, a spinach like garden herb popular in

Caribbean cuisine, which gives this Christmas drink its deep red colour.

Back home I picked my dear friend, Shatbi Basu's brains on her favourite Christmas drinks. Author of the first comprehensive guide to alcoholic beverages and cocktails relevant to Indian conditions, *The Can't Go Wrong Book Of Cocktails*, Shatbi initiated and currently heads the first institution for professional bartending in India, STIR-Academy Of Bartending, Mumbai. Here is what she had to say: "Christmas is such a special time for me. There's a nip in the air, the Christmas tree is all dressed up and the sounds of carols add to the mood of yuletide merriness. Wafts of sweet spice from the kitchen as cakes and cookies bake fill the air. It's a good time to pack the refrigerator with your favourite sparkling wines and mounds of fresh strawberries in season. That is a match made in heaven. Perfect for a Christmas brunch. Add a splash of strawberry liqueur or puree to bring out the red! Throw in some fresh mint to brighten it with green. If eggnog excites you, cold or steaming, and you don't like the egginess, cheat. Make thin custard out of a pack. Better still, it now comes in a ready pack. Whisk in some cream, bourbon or brandy, sprinkle nutmeg and you're all done. It's also a great time for my special recipe of mulled wine which is so easy to make and tastes fabulous. Play with the spices if you like. A few star anises to the mix will only add to that exotic flavour. Play with the wine—your favourite red with sugar or even maple syrup to sweeten it. A nice port—ruby in the afternoon, LBV or a nice aged tawny in the evening. Even a gooey cream sherry. A splash of a spice rum or cognac can only warm you more..."

The first records of mulled wine date back to the Romans, so it must be good if it has made it this far! ☺

Shatbi Basu's 'Secret' Mulled Wine Recipe

Glass

Wine

Ingredients

1 bottle red wine
4 tablespoons sugar
OR
1 bottle of good port or sweet sherry

10 cloves
12 small cinnamon stick bits
100 gms skinned almonds
Peel of one orange (no piths)
Peel of one lime or lemon (no piths)
4 tablespoons raisins (optional)
60 ml spiced rum (optional if you like a spike)



To Make

Put all ingredients into a saucepan, bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes.
Or heat at full power in the microwave bowl for 3 minutes or more.
Keep warm in a large flask and pour when thirsty.
Use a steel spoon in the glass while pouring hot liquid to avoid cracking.
Perfect for when it is all wintry and cold.
As you enjoy your holiday cheer, please drink responsibly. Not just for the alcohol, but also for the calories: these drinks can pack in upwards of 400 big ones per cup!