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Variety Rules in Christmas Celebrations

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CHRISTMAS in the many countries represented by foreign students at Iowa State has three common denominators—much good food, gathering of friends and relatives and church services. Otherwise, variety rules in customs, decorations and Christmas dinner.

Jamaicans go to church at 5a.m. in order to have plenty of time for the day's festivities which resemble a Mardi Gras celebration in all its splendor. Donning feather head dresses such as those worn by American Indians at war dances, masks, steer horns and sewing bright colored ribbons and bells on shirts and trousers, Jamaicans hold a masquerade parade, called a *John Canoe*.

Men, women, children and dogs join the parade to the home of a wealthy villager. After dancing and singing on his lawn, they collect money and spice cakes before going home to Christmas dinner, which is served picnic style on the lawn under the trees.

Curried goat is the *piece d'resistance* of the dinner. It's stewed in a big pot on the lawn with curry the only seasoning. "Believe me," said a Jamaican student,

cucurbits—cucumbers and midget squashes—peas and potatoes. Dessert is a rich, sweet preparation with a milk base. Milk is curdled with lemon juice, and sugar, raisins and essence of rose water are added. A sirup of cane sugar and water is poured over the curdled milk mixture.

Following a custom much like that of Guatemalans, natives in northern India prepare a chappati. Resembling a pancake in appearance it is rolled out like a cooky and baked on the hearth. Guests take a stack of chappatis and break off bits to dip into cucurbits and curry sauce for Christmas feasting. Then they eat curds and whey for dessert. Warm milk is inoculated with acidolphus bacteria and allowed to stand overnight. Flavored with essence of rose water and a sweet sirup, it is mixed with rice and served in a bowl.

After-dinner music follows feasting in both northern and southern India. The instruments are the tuba, drum, made of skins and standing 1½ feet high; the harmonium, a small keyboard about one-third the size of a piano with bellows like an accordion; the sitar

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"that's enough!" Boiled green bananas, which taste like cold boiled potatoes, yams and bread to be dipped in the curry broth accompany the goat.

Matrimony is a favorite dessert in Jamaica. The fruit resembles a May apple, tastes like a pear, forms a six-pointed star when halved and gets its name from being scooped out and "married" to chopped orange by condensed milk. The special Christmas drink topping off the dinner is *sorrel*. Made by steeping certain parts of a seed pod several days, this drink tastes like cranberry juice flavored with pineapple juice.

After dinner everyone takes a nap in preparation for the night's activities which are heralded by the sound of *mento*, music of the rhumba, played by violin, guitar, cello and drum, for street dancing. With jasmine and roses in their hair, señoritas and their escorts dance till dawn, going home to recuperate on Boxing Day.

There are two stories on the origin of Boxing Day. One says it comes from the time when British ruled the island and held their boxing bouts on December 26th. The other, that it is an old custom from the days when people gathered from miles around at one plantation to observe Christmas. On the day following they gathered up their presents and boxed them before going home.

The traditional Christmas tree in Jamaica is the dwarf pine with presents hung on it. Heaped around its base is the supply of fruits for the two-week holiday season: pineapple, papaws, guamadelas, pomegranites, oranges and cashew nuts. Red and white roses replace evergreen decorations for Jamaican homes.

IN INDIA, Christmas is not observed throughout the land because most of the people are Mohammedans and Hindus. The natives who have become Christians, however, have Christmas services, music and dinners rivaling those of their North American neighbors. A big mound of rice called palau, cooked in ghee, a butter oil, and topped with curry is served on a copper tray. Surrounding it on side dishes are

which is a dried pumpkin half shell with seven wire strings stretched over a wooden neck often reaching a height of 8 feet; bamboo flutes and variations of the sitar orchestra. The Indian student at the conclusion of the interview said, "As throughout the rest of the world, the day ends on the sounds of 'Silent Night, Holy Night.'"

GUATEMALANS also open the holiday season with a parade. The children, led by a priest, go from house to house playing toy flutes, and carrying flowers and an image of the Christ Child, seeking permission to prepare a Posada, resting place, for Mary and Joseph. When accepted, they offer special prayers and Christmas carols before being served sweetbread and coffee.

Erection of the Nacimiento, or Nativity Scene, is a custom dating from 1223 when St. Francis of Assisi set up the first crib scene in Italy. On a relief map of Bethlehem, little wooden figures of the wise men, shepherds, angels and the scene at the inn are set up. Then during the Holy Days from December 22 to Noche-Buena, the good night when Christ was born, open house is held so that all the villagers may visit the Nacimiento, sing carols and hear the Christmas story.

"Feasting in our own homes follows the Nacimiento with Tamales de Carna, the turkey in Guatemala," said a student from that country. Turkey is cooked and cut off the bone, mixed with ripe olives, pimienta and raisins in thickened broth and placed in the tamales. These have been made of a fine white corn meal instead of the usual yellow corn meal. Singing around a candle-lighted Christmas tree completes the feasting and precedes church services at midnight. Ringing bells and shooting off fire crackers and sky rockets the Guatemalans welcome Christmas Day.

by Rosalie Riglin