Christmas Eve in Denmark [1]

Unlike many other countries, Denmark celebrates Christmas on Christmas Eve.

In Denmark Christmas is celebrated on Christmas Eve the 24th of December. Everybody is busy buying present and preparing dinner on the day of Christmas Eve and the children are extremely excited waiting with great anticipation for the evening to arrive. In the old days it was common to give the animals a special treat on Christmas Eve. It was widely believed that all animals could talk on this special night, and nobody would like the animals to speak ill of you. Today some families continue that tradition. They go for a walk in the garden, in the park or forest and bring along small goodies for the animals on this very special occasion. A lot of people attend an early Christmas mass in church before the Christmas dinner not necessarily because they are devoted churchgoers, but because they enjoy the tradition of gathering in church and singing Danish Christmas carols as part of the Christmas spirit. Dinner is served quite early. Most people eat roast duck on Christmas Eve but roast goose or roast pork with crackling rinds is also commonly served. The duck or goose is stuffed with apples and prunes and served with boiled and sweet potatoes, red cabbage and beets and cranberry jam. The dessert consists of ‘ris à l’amande’ (rice pudding with whipped cream, vanilla and almonds) with hot cherry sauce or ‘risengrød’ (hot rice pudding). A peeled almond is hidden in the dessert bowl and the lucky finder of the almond gets a present. A good claret goes extremely well with this dinner, and maybe an old Port or Madeira with the dessert.

Dancing around the tree

After dinner the tree is lit, at last, and everyone joins hands with one another and dances around the tree singing traditional Danish Christmas hymns and carols. When the children have had quite enough of the singing (and that doesn’t take very long) it is finally time for the unwrapping of gifts. Normally, one of the children is chosen to select the wrapped presents under the tree and hand them over one at the time so everyone can watch each individual present being unwrapped. After the last present, it is time for fresh fruit, cookies, candy and coffee. On Christmas Day only the children get up early to enjoy their presents from the night before. This day is a very quiet time in most families as the more formal visits with luncheons and other activites normally don't begin until the 26th of December.