

A time of giving and celebration

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THERE'S many things about Christmas that bring great joy – from gift-giving to festive traditions.

And each plays an important part in human interaction, helping to strengthen bonds with loved ones.

Human behaviour specialist Mark Carter said the act of gift-giving has been a tradition between communities for centuries.

“It is one of fulfilment, which comes with a nice little dopamine rush, or joy that has been amplified through the smile of the receiver,” he said.

The spirit of Christmas varies as countries celebrate with their own customs, songs and foods.

Here, Mr Carter looks at how Christmas is celebrated around the world.

■ There are many global Christmas traditions. The story of St Nicholas is one of the most popular, with our modern-day Santa evolving from a German Bishop who gave to the needy.

■ The Giant Lantern Festival in the Philippines has run mid-December for over a century. The colourful release of giant lanterns creates a vast beacon of light to inspire optimism and hope.

■ There's the darker side of Christmas from central European countries. St. Nicholas rewards the well-behaved, while Krampus (half goat, half demon) punishes the naughty.

■ In Norway, folklore suggests that Christmas Eve is an opening for evil spirits, with the tradition of households hiding brooms so that witches and warlocks can not run amok.

■ In Iceland they do not settle for one Santa Claus, but rather 13 in the form of mischievous, playful Yule lads who traditionally leave candies in shoes rather than stockings.

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