



It's the most joyous time of the year...
... in Iceland.

SOFIA NIKOLAOU



Christmas is often known as 'Yule' or 'Jól' in Iceland. This period includes the New Year celebrations as well.



There are lots of customs and traditions to celebrate Yule in Iceland. The Yule season consists of the following days:



Þorláksmessa - St. Thorlakur's Day - December 23rd



On St. Thorlakur's Day, the main custom is eating a simple meal of skate which is some kind of fish. The Christmas tree is usually decorated on this day. This is also a big shopping day for last minute gifts, with stores remaining open until midnight.

Nowadays, there are evergreen trees grown on Iceland and people have evergreen Yule trees. It is traditional to have a star or crown on top of the tree. The Icelandic Flag is also used as a decoration.

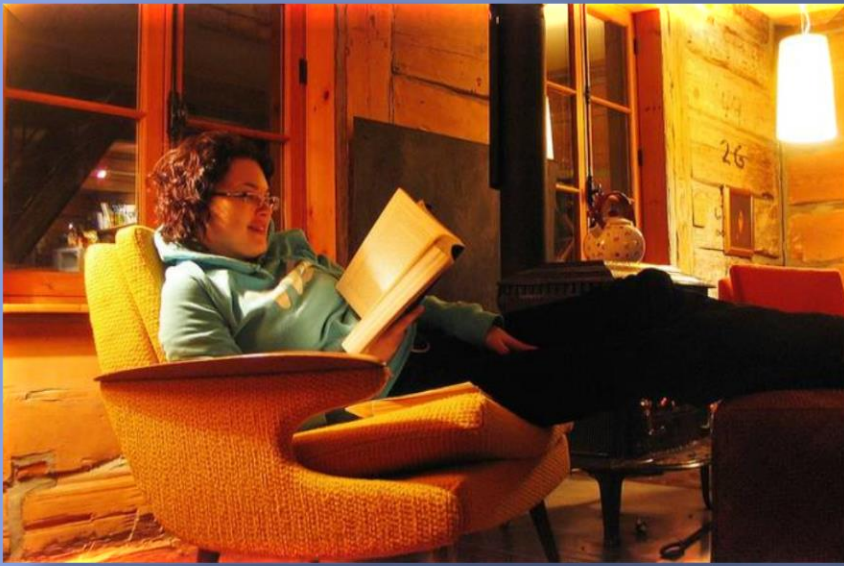


A tree stands outside Reykjavík Cathedral and is a yearly present from the people of Oslo, Norway.

Aðfangadagur - Christmas Eve / Yule Eve



Celebrations start at 6.00 pm on Yule Eve. Children in Iceland open their presents after the evening meal.

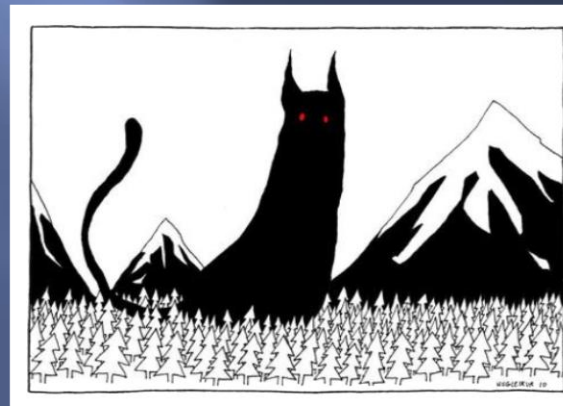


In Iceland, books are exchanged as Christmas Eve presents, and then they spend the rest of the night in bed reading them and eating chocolate. The season between September and November in Iceland is called 'The Christmas Book Flood' because that's when most books are sold as people get prepared for the upcoming Christmas holidays.

Jóladagur - Christmas Day / Yule Day



Jóladagur is usually celebrated with the extended family. The main Yule meal is 'Hangikjöt', a leg of roast lamb. Sometimes 'Rjúpa', a sea bird is also eaten. Another Yule meal speciality is 'Laufabrauð' or leaf bread. This is made of thin sheets of dough cut into thin patterns and fried.



An old Icelandic folklore states that everyone has to get one new piece of clothing at Christmas. Anyone who was left out was in danger of being eaten by a malicious beast called the Christmas Cat. The Christmas Cat is Grýla's cat . Grýla is one of the Yule Lads and every effort was made to make sure that no-one would “go to the Christmas Cat”. So, everyone worked very hard to make a new piece of clothing for each member of the household

Annar Jóladagur - Boxing Day



This is another day for visiting friends and family and eating lots more! Public entertainment is considered inappropriate on Yule Eve and Yule Day, and it is on Boxing Day that dancing is again allowed in public!

Gamlárskvöld / Nýársdagur - New Year's Eve / New Year's Day



This is one of the most important nights of the year in Iceland and there are several magical traditions that are supposed to happen on it! Cows are meant to be able to talk, seals take on human form, the dead rise from their graves, and the Elves move house. Bonfires are lit to 'blow out' the year.

Þrettándinn - Epiphany - January 6th

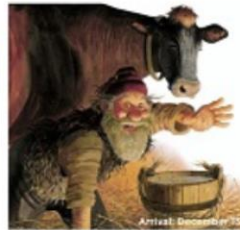


This is the last day of Yule, celebrated with bonfires and Elfin dances. Many of the magical traditions associated with New Year's Eve are also supposed to happen at Þrettándinn.

The Icelandic Yule Lads



Stekkjastaur (Sheep-Cote Clod)
Harasses sheep, impeded by his stiff dog-legs



Giljagaur (Gully Gawk)
Hides in gullies, waiting for an opportunity to sneak into the cowshed and steal milk.



Stúfur (Stubby)
Abnormally short. Steals pans to eat the crust left on them



Þvörsuleikur (Spoon-Licker)
Steals Þvödur (a type of a wooden spoon) to lick. Is extremely thin due to malnutrition



Pottasleiki (Pot-Licker)
Steals leftovers from pots



Askasleikur (Bowl-Licker)
Hides under beds waiting for someone to put down their 'askur' (a type of bowl), which he then steals



Hurðaskellir (Door-Slammer)
Likes to slam doors, especially during the night



Skýgámur (Skyr-Gobbler)
A Yule Lad with an affinity for skyr



Þjúgnakrækir (Sausage-Swiper)
Would hide in the rafters and snatch sausages that were being smoked



Gluggagægir (Window-Peeper)
A voyeur who would look through windows in search of things to steal



Gáttaþefur (Doorway-Sniffer)
Has an abnormally large nose and an acute sense of smell which he uses to locate lauftraub



Ketkrókur (Meat-Hook)
Uses a hook to steal meat



Kertasníkir (Candle-Stealer)
Follows children in order to steal their candles (which in those days was made of tallow and thus edible)



Grýla
The mother of the Yule Lads. Icelandic parents did scare their children from misbehaving by telling them that Grýla could come and abduct them



Leppalúði
The husband of Grýla. Not that evil, but a lazy one.

Another big Yule custom is the coming of the 'Jólasveinarnir' or Yuletide Lads. These are magical people who come from the mountains in Iceland. Each day from December 12th to Yule Eve a different Yuletide lad comes.



They leave little presents for children in shoes placed on the windowsill. If children have been naughty, they might leave a potato or a little message telling them to be good. They start going home on Christmas Day, with the last one leaving on Þrettándinn.

ICELANDIC
GLEÐILEG
JÓL OG
FARSÆLT
NÝTT ÁR!



