



Santa's cousins

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Christmas is traditionally a time of dreams and gifts. But it is not only our local Saint Nicholas (in other countries known as Santa Claus or Papa Noël) who is responsible for this particularly pleasant tradition.

In Russia where after years of secularism of social life under USSR celebrating Christmas is not as popular as New Year (also the so-called "Old New Year" which by the Julian calendar falls on January 14) gifts are given by Ded Moroz and his granddaughter Snegurochka. Children in France believe that their boots are filled with gifts by little Baby Jesus and in Sweden by Jultomten, a gnome similar to the Danish Nisse who lives in a barn and protects families. On the other hand, children in Rome, Florence and Milan - Krakow's Italian partner cities - will be handed gifts by an old witch Befana. She delivers sweets if children are good and lumps of coal or garlic if they are bad, however not on December 6 or Christmas Day but on Epiphany - January 6. In Spain Epiphany is celebrated with a special pastry *roscón de reyes* (kings' ring) with almonds and trinkets hidden inside.