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EDITOR'S LETTER FINNISH HERO



are set in the capital of Finland. He shows his city with utmost realism, without any romance.

The universe of the filmmaker is inhabited by ordinary, often very kind people: waitresses and saleswomen, garbage collectors and miners, tram and bus drivers, people who curse their work when they have it and curse life when they lose their job.

Kaurismäki's excellent film "The Man Without a Past" received the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002 and was the first in the history of Finnish cinema to be nominated for an Oscar in 2003. But Kaurismäki did not go to the ceremony in Los Angeles to protest the war in Iraq. For which I respect him very much.

My favourite films by Kaurismäki make up the director's proletarian trilogy: "Drifting Clouds", "The Man Without a Past" and "Lights in the Dusk".

If you want to fall in love with Finland with all your passion, watch Aki Kaurismäki's films.

Victor Loupan

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HIGHLIGHTS

CHRISTMAS AND CONSUMPTION CULTURE

The Catholic Church and various Protestant congregations are trying to struggle against the commercialisation of the great Christian holiday, but they are not doing well

VICTOR LOUPAN,
Head of the Editorial Board

When I lived in the United States in the mid-eighties, all supermarkets, right next to the cash registers, had large stands with greeting cards. The inscriptions and illustrations on them were different, depending on the seasons and the holidays. These cheerful and dedicated postcards, of course, were not always beautiful – there was also enough tastelessness.

In December, the stands were literally inundated with postcards with endless variations of Christmas greetings. The typical American phrasing “*Merry Xmas!*” prevailed, which means “Merry Christmas!” And much less often you could see postcards with a longer text: “*Merry Xmas and Happy New Year!*”

The fact is that, unlike Russia with its Soviet heritage (the Kremlin chimes and New Year’s Eve), in the West, the main family holiday is not New Year, but Christmas, which is celebrated on the night of December 24–25, that is, exactly a week before the New Year.

Today you rarely see “*Merry Xmas!*” words. Everywhere there are only “*Happy Holidays!*” greetings, and it is not clear what holiday they celebrate, although based on the illustrations with snow-covered Christmas trees and New Year’s decorations, it is obvious that we are talking about “winter holidays”.

There are many signs of de-Christianisation of Western society. But

none of them is as obvious as the rejection of the very mention of the Nativity of Christ. Holidays and vacation periods still continue, for now, to be called “Christmas” or “Easter” holidays, as if due to tradition or habit. Although this is already a kind of paradox in the context of the current radicalisation of the struggle against cultural, religious, family, civilisational traditions and the values arising from them. Nowadays in the West, Christmas is not real Christmas, but the main riot of the year, in essence, a blasphemous cult of consumption. People frantically run around the shops crowded with customers and, – if they do not find what they are looking for, because everything is being bought up, – then they take any random things. Even on credit.

The protracted pandemic, QR codes and fear of being infected have made it harder for the strong collective need to shop. But thanks to the Internet, Westerners still manage to satisfy their frantic craving for consumption.

No matter how strange it may seem to us, and Western sociologists are surprised to emphasise this fact, but despite the general impoverishment of population ascertained by all observers, Christmas consumer passions, which more and more often resemble convulsions, are presenting continuously. People save on vacations, give up travel, fail to buy books

or go to the theater or cinema, but still spend money on Christmas gifts.

The fundamental family and religious tradition associated with the celebration of a joyful event – the birth of the Infant Christ – continues to be a family one and a reason for meeting in an extended circle of the family, but now joy level more and more relies on financial component – receiving or giving gifts.

The Catholic Church and various Protestant congregations are trying to struggle against the commercialisation of the great Christian holiday, but they are not doing well. Moreover, usually half-empty churches are suddenly replenished with parishioners on Christmas Eve. Or rather, that category of people who visit the church twice a year – at Christmas and Easter. These are already unbelievers or little believers who enter the church out of old memory, out of habit, due to the memory of how their parents took them there in childhood, or how beautiful it all seemed to them in childhood, when they still believed.

The New Year that comes a week after Christmas is no longer a family holiday, but rather an excuse to meet friends, drink and dance together.

A calendar in pre-revolutionary Russia was differing from the European one. But the 13-day difference did not change the essence: first, Christmas, and a week later, New Year. But since 1917, the situation has changed.

Society began to live “according to a new style”, but the Church continued to live according to the Julian calendar. This means that New Year in Russia, on the contrary, precedes Christmas. We don’t think much about that, but, in fact, our New Year, with its hard drinking and gorging, was as much a Soviet holiday as May 1 or November 7. Because traditional Orthodox families did not celebrate it, or celebrated it just in a tokenistic way, for the simple reason that the Nativity of Christ in Orthodoxy is preceded by the Christmas Fast – the last multi-day fast of the year. This year it began on November 15 (28 new style) and will continue until December 24 (January 6). It lasts forty days and is therefore referred to in the church statutes as the Forty Day Fast, or Lent – just like the Great Fast before Easter.

The establishment of the Christmas Fast, like other multi-day fasts, dates back to the ancient Christianity, when the church was single and there was no difference between Catholics and Orthodox. The 4th century saints Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo mentioned the Christmas Fast. In the 5th century, Pope Saint Leo I (The Great) wrote about the antiquity of the Christmas Fast. At that time there was no difference between Eastern and Western Christians.

Initially, the Christmas Fast lasted seven days for some Christians, while for others it lasted a little longer. And only at the council of 1166, which

was under the Patriarch Luke to Constantinople and the Emperor Manuel to Byzantine Empire, all Christians were supposed to follow a forty-day



Photo: Annie Spratt

fast before the great feast of the Nativity of Christ.

The very celebration of the Nativity of Christ dates back to the times of the apostles. The apostolic decrees say: "Keep, brethren, the feast days and, first of all, the day of the Nativity of Christ, which may be celebrated by you on the 25th day of the tenth month." The tenth month is "*decembri*", December. It also says: "Let them celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, it is the day when unexpected grace was given to people by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world."

In 303, during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Diocletian, 20 000 Christians were burned on the day of the Nativity of Christ. But soon, under the emperor Constantine the Great, the church gained independence and became dominant in the Roman Empire. The 17th century author Nicephorus Callistus wrote in his famous "Church History" that in the 6th century the Emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout the earth.

Christmas is one of the oldest holidays not only in Europe, but also around the globe. We often forget that alternation of holidays give a special rhythm to the calendar year. In a spiritual sense, they rhyme it. Because the great holidays are always spiritual in nature. Before Christianity, there were many holidays in the Roman Empire associated with the cult of the gods, moreover, not only the Roman *stricto sensu*, but also the Egyptian ones. In Rome, for example, there was a temple of the goddess Isis, who symbolised femininity and motherhood.

The Vikings, Varangians, Scythians, Dacians, Thracians had their own gods and their own great holidays, often accompanied by bloody sacrifices. Over time, the established and strengthened Christian civilisation abolished pagan customs, and now we know little about them. But



Photo: Danny Lines

manifestations and even bursts of pagan Bacchanalia periodically appear. The Great French Revolution was one of them. Not only because of the martyrdom of thousands of Catholic priests, but also because of the grotesque change in the calendar, the cancellation of the countdown from the birth of Christ, the change in the names of the months of the year and other nonsense, in particular, the renaming of Notre Dame Cathedral into the Temple of Reason.

Fascism, especially in Germany and especially among SS personnel, was permeated with pagan mysticism with its rituals, processions, temples and other devilry.

The well-known Soviet period in the history of Russia and the eastern part of Europe also bore a pseudo-religious, pagan character. The cult of Lenin, the cult of Stalin, the cult of the Revolution, the infallibility of the Communist Party, national holidays with staged processions, fig-

ures of martyrs, such as Pavlik Morozov, Pavel Korchagin, Alexander Matrosov, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, the closure and destruction of churches, the unprecedented physical extermination of priests and persecution of believers, the ban on all religious holidays and rituals – all this speaks of the pagan essence of the regime. Despite claims to be scientific and knowledgeable, the pseudo-religious essence of communist ideology is undeniable.

Today many Western analysts and generally thinkers are surprised to note the depression of society. The cult of profit has not justified itself for a long time, because the number of the poor has been constant-

ly growing. Belief in democracy and equality is also going through hard times. Racial, ethnic, gender and other minorities consider themselves disadvantaged. When criticising the "androcentric society", the younger generation actually rejects the foundations and essence of Western civilisation. Islamisation, especially in European society, occurs as if Islam fills the spiritual emptiness of a society that has renounced the Christian faith and civilisation to remain essentially naked and defenceless.

Taking the example of what the holiday of the Nativity of Christ has become, one can notice the substitution of the Christian religion of love with the pagan religion of consumption. Love for one's neighbour has been replaced by love for an object acquired for money.

In this regard, advertising, with its propaganda techniques, is quite indicative. Realising that many people are already deeply in debt, marketing

and promotion specialists come up with moral and ideological moves. They argue, for example, that the average person, when buying a product, expresses moral responsibility and does a good deed, thereby contributing to the growth of emerging economies. And buying "green" products helps to save the planet. Laymen who do not see the meaning of life, receive the message through the specifically refined propaganda, which convinces them that they are not manipulated tools, but responsible buyers who, while spending money on all odds and ends, actually do good and thereby attach meaning to their life.

But let's again return to Christmas as a holiday. For the holiday of consumption remains a holiday in spite of everything. People rejoice in it in advance, seeing city decorations, festive lighting funded by the municipalities of Paris, London or Berlin. Iconic commercial enterprises, such as London's Harrods or Parisian Galeries Lafayette, spend huge amounts of money to decorate their windows which are sometimes so unusual and attractive, that thousands of onlookers who do not have enough money to buy something at these expensive department stores, crowd the sidewalks, simply admiring the advertised luxury and, of course, dreaming about it.

Any technology of power lies in the ability to take possession of the minds, thoughts, dreams of those whom leaders wish to lead. Behind any true (and not only totalitarian) power, there is an idea. Charles de Gaulle was guided by the idea of the Fifth Republic, Boris Johnson – by the idea of Brexit, Donald Trump – by the revival of America. In Europe, the degradation of the "European idea" has led to the fact that there is nothing positive, nothing to dream about. The struggle against migrants, the war against Islamisation, the opposition to populism, adversarial relationship with Russia, the growth of the ultra-right movements. All this is not only negative, but also defensive.

And yet it is human nature to strive for something uplifting. People need positive dynamics that can bring them satisfaction. The satisfaction that they contribute to something important and good, proving that their existence is not meaningless, but is filled with the essence, which is commonly called the "meaning of life."

Due to the absence of any alternative to the existing system and the world order arising from it, there is no – and cannot be – any semantic dynamics. Earlier, millions of Europeans dreamed of equality, fraternity, socialism, communism, a world without borders, the end of exploitation. Thirty years ago, all these dreams and utopias came to an end. They were replaced by an all-encompassing neoliberal ideology, the essence of which is to reduce a human being to the level of an obedient individual, whose life consists of consumption based on a constant feeling of inner dissatisfaction. Not knowing how to get rid of this feeling, the layman continues to consume, which only aggravates the metaphysical feeling of frustration.

In this – and not only in this – regard, Christmas became a truly political holiday in modern society, where mass consumption summa-

riser everything, including the ideas of good and evil that are vital for every person.

Here is a quote from Chuck Palahniuk's cult novel "*Fight Club*": "What are we then?.. We are consumers. We are by-products of a lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, poverty, these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with 500 channels, some guy's name on my underwear." And here is what the great American-German philosopher Erich Fromm wrote about the same: "Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit... if he succeeds in this, he is "successful" and his life has meaning; if not, "he is a failure." His "value" lies in his salability, not in his human qualities of love and reason nor in his artistic capacities."

And here is the last quote, which summarises briefly and clearly the whole essence of the consumer society. It belongs to the great American unique Jacques Fresco: "The consumer society is a society of single people who have everything except what they really need."

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Photo: Chantal DeGaut

SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS IN FINLAND

By ELLA LARINA

If you're planning a Christmas getaway, Finland has all the answers: not only is it the home of Santa, but it also provides a fresh, sustainable approach to travels with its Sustainable Travel Finland program.

Climate change and the global pandemic have highlighted the urgent need for holistic sustainable travel practices to be implemented in order for the travel industry to survive in the future. Visit Finland's nationwide Sustainable Travel Finland program aims to make sustainability and responsible travel the new norm. Posio in Lapland is the first travel destination in Finland awarded the program's label.

Finland is a small country on the global scale, yet it is among the top 10 sustainable countries in the world (Environmental Perform Index). Almost 80% of Finland's land area is covered by forest, it has the richest freshwater resources in the EU in a total of 188,000 lakes and the cleanest air in the world.

Finland is the happiest country in the world according to the World Happiness Report from 2018, 2019 and 2020, the best country in the world in a comparison of human wellbeing (Sustainable Society Index in 2016) and it's committed to becoming the first carbon-neutral welfare state by 2035. In Finland, the travel industry, as well as nature and everyday life, rely entirely on changing seasons and a lifestyle close to nature.

Visit Finland launched The Sustainable Travel Finland program in with the aim of making sustainability a new norm in the travel industry and

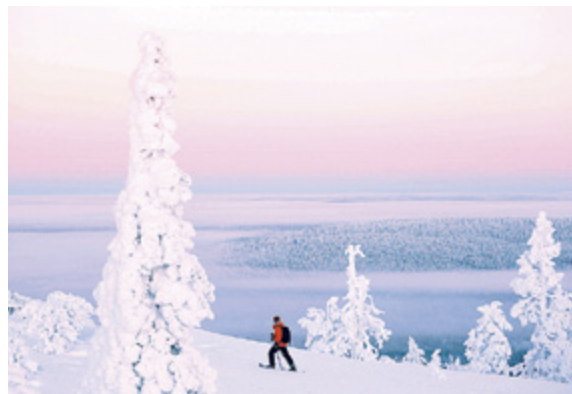


Finland one of the most sustainable travel destinations in the world.

"We want to nurture, conserve and preserve our pure and pristine nature, the Finnish lifestyle that is so firmly rooted in it, and our culture that celebrates equality," explains Liisa Kokkarinen, the Manager for Sustainable development at Visit Finland / Business Finland.

Holistic approach to sustainability

The Sustainable Travel Finland initiative focuses on all four dimensions of sustainability: economical, ecological, social and cultural. The label is awarded only to companies and destinations that have undergone the entire Sustainable Travel Finland program and fulfilled the 7-step criteria including commitment to national sustainable tourism principles and drawing up a sustainable tourism development plan with short and long terms goals.



"While Finland is considered a sustainable country, thus far there has been no way of identifying a tourism provider that is committed to sustainable development. By choosing a STF labelled experience, a traveler can support local tourism efforts

towards sustainability and ensure that his or her journey has a positive impact on the local culture and economy, while minimizing negative impacts on the environment," Kokkarinen continues.

The popularity of the STF program has been overwhelming and exceeded all expectations Visit Finland set prior to the pandemic. More than 500 companies and destinations have already applied to be a part of the program. So far, 57 companies and 1 destination have completed the journey and have been awarded with the Sustainable Travel Finland label.

"Prior to the pandemic, tourism in Finland was growing fast and steadily, which is one of the reasons we are

investing in sustainability so heavily. The pandemic has given us the time to build our readiness and once travelling can happen again, we should be able to welcome our international guests to a Finland that is stronger, resilient and sustainable," says Kokkarinen.

Posio – the hidden gem of Finnish Lapland

Posio is a small nature-loving community with a population of a little more than 3,000 inhabitants in Lapland. It is the first travel destination to be awarded with the Sustainable Travel Finland label and it can also be found on the global 2020 Sustainable Destinations Top 100 list organised by the global Green Destinations foundation and its partners.

In Posio enchanting landscapes inspire travelers to rediscover the essentials. The national parks of Rieisunturi and Syöte, Korouoma canyon, Lake Livojärvi, "the riviera of Lapland" and Pentik-mäki cultural centre create unique surrounding for nature and culture travel.

"Posio is characterised as the hidden gem of Finnish Lapland. The local companies have actively nurtured sustainability in their operations for years. As a result of the Sustainable Travel Finland program, companies have adopted new sustainability measures like saving energy and water and they have increased the use of local food," comments Marja Hannula, Managing Director of Posio Travel.

In Lapland, the carbon-neutral Pyhä Ski Resort has also been awarded the label and it is now aiming to become the world's cleanest ski center. In other parts of Finland, travelers can find sustainable experiences such as Suomenlinna, which is the Unesco Heritage Site located on the coast of Helsinki, Aavameri which arranges multi day sea kayaking expeditions in Archipelago Sea National Park and Turku and Silent



People Meadow Cafe and Restaurant in Lakeland offering outdoor exhibition and fire-brewed coffee and delicious butter-baked Finnish crepes.

"For travelers who are looking for responsible ways to experience the peace, quiet and purity of nature, authentic local culture, to feel safe and feel a sense of space – Finland offers all this," states Kokkarinen.

Visit Finland launched Sustainable Travel Finland in 2019. After a one-year piloting phase, the program was opened to the entire travel industry in Finland in June 2020.

The label is only awarded to those companies and destinations that have undergone the entire Sustaina-

ble Travel Finland program and fulfilled the criteria. It includes regular auditing and renewal of the label and requires true commitment to sustainable development.

Initially, when setting up the Sustainable Travel Finland program, the current state, obstacles and requirements for sustainable tourism development in Finland were surveyed. The following areas for development were recognized: commitment, knowhow, planning, communication, auditing and measuring. Instead of adopting a "ready" international model in Finland, a national model was designed to address these needs, as well as regional differences.

HISTORY

CHRISTMAS DURING THE FIRST WAR WORLD

Despite the pressures of war, many people still made time for Christmas traditions

Those who lived through the First World War experienced Christmas in a variety of ways. One of the most famous Christmas-time events was the truce that took place along some parts of the line on the Western Front in 1914. Imperial War Museum in their “Voices of the First World War” series takes us on a journey through these times.

British officer John Wedderburn-Maxwell took part in the truce. He described what he did after it was stopped.

“After the war had recommenced, I went up to see the Lincoln colonel. And there I found the second in command and the adjutant sitting down to a jolly good Christmas, which they’d sent across and told me to come and join. And we had roast pheasant – it was wonderful the way they could cook in those trenches on charcoal fires – roast pheasant and plum pudding and plenty of rum. Of course, the colonel could always get rather more than the ration! No, we had a real slap-up meal.”

In 1914, Britain’s Princess Mary set up a fund to provide a gift for every man serving at the front or at sea that Christmas. James Naylor of the Royal Field Artillery recalled his.

“It was a gilt box containing a message and card. In it, there were two packets: one packet of cigarettes and one packet of tobacco. I’ve still got mine, it’s still in its canvas case, and the cigarettes and tobacco are still there intact. Of course, I didn’t smoke in those days and that’s why, I suppose, I kept it.”

Colin Wilson of the Grenadier Guards spent part of that first Christ-

mas at war having dinner with the future King Edward VIII.

“We as the Grenadiers were relieved on, I think it was Boxing Day we was relieved. And went to the rear, oh two or three hundred yards behind the line, I suppose, or so-called line. And there we had our Christmas dinner, accompanied by the Prince of Wales who was then serving with my regiment.”

Despite the pressures of war, many people still made time for Christmas traditions. Margaret Callender put a special effort into decorating the military hospital in Britain where she was a nurse.

“That was my happy time! I did all the decorations for my ward, anyhow. Two Christmases I was there and did that. The other nurses helped me, you know, but I had to devise it all. We had very big mantle pieces and in the winter time I made a cottage with snow on top and light inside, windows and so on. And on the dark blue blinds I made a night sky, I had little polar bears and things in front and snow and little huts, too. And I put stars on the dark window, you see. And I think all the lights were snow drops.”

And Louie Johnson ensured that each of the patients at her hospital in Leeds received a Christmas present.

“People would kindly come in and give me little presents for the men, or money to buy presents. And I used to go to Leeds and make a little gift parcel for every man. Usually a packet of cigarettes, tobacco pouch, perhaps a scarf if they were going out, or an ounce of tobacco or something like that. And give every man a little pres-

ent on Christmas morning, every time, every day.”

Concert parties were often put on to entertain the men serving at the front. Frederick Goodman of the Royal Army Medical Corps appreciated the hard work that went into those he attended.

“Christmas was a wonderful time. That was very well arranged. You see, all this depended – to make it a success – it would be left of course primarily to the sergeant major because he was the key of the whole thing, for that sort of thing. In other words, we had to have people on special duty or to go get this that and the other, whatever. And it meant a certain amount of time available to these chaps, they couldn’t be put on some other work. So he would agree to prepare for this sort of thing in a proper way. These chaps would be given quite a degree of latitude in doing whatever was necessary. Go and collect this that and the other, out of the line we had to be for a Christmas festivity, of course, and that sort of thing. And then, of course, always the party. We’d have this Christmas party going on. We played Aladdin or something, whatever it was, and so on. Cinderella, I believe, and that sort of thing. Oh, all sorts of things like that and they were very well done too.”

Some of the men who were unlucky enough to spend Christmas day in the front line cheered themselves up by singing carols. Arthur Wagstaff, of the London Regiment, spent Christmas 1915 at Gallipoli.

“Christmas day in the front lines was no joke, of course. Some of our boys who were off duty were in a

shelter at the back of the trench, they were singing carols. That was on Christmas Day. I was on the firing step, looking over the no man’s land. And two officers came along and they heard these carols and one said to the other, ‘Could you believe it: conditions such as these, and the boys were singing carols...’”

A good or bad Christmas experience often depended on whether the men were supplied with enough food and drink to properly celebrate the occasion. British NCO Frederick Higgins had fond memories of an important part of the Christmas dinner menu.

“I had four Christmases there and the only thing I can remember about the Christmases was that we had Christmas pud-

ding every Christmas. We had a ration of Christmas pudding, but what else we had I really don’t know! But Christmas pudding always remained in my mind. It didn’t matter where you was, there was a ration of Christmas pudding for you every Christmas. I’d be scooping it out with a spoon out of the tins; they were big tins holding about seven pounds, I suppose, all specially made. If somebody said you’ve got to have a bit of Christmas pudding, no doubt I would I must say, speaking for myself! We had Christmas pudding every Christmas. I can’t remember what we had to eat, what the dinner was, but we certainly had afters!”

George Wray of the Royal Naval Division thought that he was going to get to celebrate Christmas 1917, but he was soon called back into action in France.



A British soldier holding up a can of Christmas pudding at snow-covered Neulette, France 17 December 1917. Photo: IWM

“We were relieved on Christmas Eve and we had to go back to a town called Metz, it was about 5km from our lines, you see. So we went back. It was Christmas morning and going back we were fully expecting that we’d be there for a while and we would be able, which we did, to have our breakfast and have our parcels from home and letters to read and all this. And about 11 o’clock, 12 o’clock, word came that the Germans had broken the line that we’d left. They’d broken through the line and they’d taken some of the men prisoners. So of course, we had to leave everything, get packed up and go back again. Sad to say, we lost quite a few men...”

Christmas during the war was experienced and celebrated in a range of ways. It often provided no more than a brief respite from the harsh conditions of life at the front. Ambu-

lance driver Alice Remington clearly recalled a moment of Christmas calm during her time on the Western Front.

“One particular Christmas which was a really beautiful starlit night, it was Christmas Eve, and a very big convoy came in, but they weren’t badly wounded. They were all very cheerful at the idea of having Christmas in bed. We started singing; I think it was ‘Hark the Herald Angels’ or something. Anyhow, they all sang and it was such a very quiet, still night and you could hear them going up and winding up and down this hill, these boys singing their hearts out, Christmas carols. It was really a lovely thing, moon shining, and the stars shining and these boys all singing carols as they went up to the hospital. They were so thankful; they knew they’d get a bath and a clean. It was wonderful, I’ll always remember that night.”

Imperial War Museum

CHRISTMAS TIME

On 28 November, the Orthodox Church began the Nativity Fast

AUGUSTIN SOKOLOWSKI,
Doctor of Theology, priest

Fasting in the Orthodox tradition is much more important than simply abstaining from certain foods and drinks. Fasting is the poetry of the harmony of body and soul, born of the refusal to give in to their demands. Fasting is a refusal to become unnecessary and superfluous. Fasting is the beginning of something new, fasting is also the beginning of Christmas.

Fasting is a time when – far away from the city, in the desert, in the snow or in warm latitudes – one seems to reach out to the stars, thus bringing God closer to us. God looks at us more lovingly, kinder, more humanly. Lent is a time when God is especially still. He looks at us and pretends not to hear. God simply becomes quieter.

Of course, these biblical analogies are difficult for us children of post-modernism, the “descendants” of Jean-Paul-Sartre with his definition of man as self-affirming freedom without God. Let us not forget, however, that in the Bible God lives, loves, laments over our sins, mourns and rejoices. God has ears, hands and feet and he has eyes. In the Bible, God can even... sleep. Or, as it says in the Psalms, “But as from a dream the Lord arose, like a giant defeated by wine” (Psalm 77:65). God defeated by wine! Or, as the “Memorial” of the philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) says during the Christmas season of 1654, “Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, but not God of philosophers and scientists. Trust. Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ”.

The ancient tradition of the Church calls the Nativity Fast “Advent”,

which means the “time of coming”. The Lord draws nearer day by day, drawing nearer to the world and to the Church on Christmas Day. When we say this and recall what happened more than two thousand years ago at the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, we are by no means performing some kind of “mystery”, as if we were trying to reproduce that once and for all took place in history... No. But, at the same time, each time in a new way and directly, as if for the first time, we see what happened then. Let us be aware of it. In our heart, in our mind, in our feelings and in our body. “In our laughter and in our tears.” Lent is not a time of dieting, but a time of drawing near to the Lord Jesus. The work of God that He once did, having entered into history, settled in time, became temporary and historical, and became one of us. This work was done before God but continues to end in history. In this sense, the world and its redemption are the work of God. Moreover, there is no salvation outside the world. Therefore, God will never abandon this work of His.

Existing in time, we grow older every moment. “Ten minutes older”, as the title of the film of the same name says. But from the Bible we also know that we are transient except for time. And this temporality of ours is surrounded by illness, sorrow, sadness, suffering, as well as happiness, fun, smiles, laughter, and joy. These two so completely opposite qualities of our being in the Christmas season are ordered according to God’s plan.

In Christ Jesus, God once entered history and took on our everything.

In return, he gave us all his own. In order to enter into the Christmas season, it is necessary to have recourse to the sacraments more often. A sacrament is a visible blessing given by the Lord on the journey of life. Sacrament is a part of God’s Work when He takes upon Himself our sicknesses, sufferings, mistakes, thoughtlessness, stupidity, strangeness, incomprehensibility, and tragedy. For our healing, God makes our tragedy a part of His cross. That is, it connects with what He Himself once did when He was born, entered history, and ascended to the Cross. It turns out that the Lord takes upon Himself what is inconsistent in us and in the world with His plan for us. To reward us with mercy, blessing, a smile, and the approach of His eyes. When the stars will be near. And the world and we will see Him –the glorious Messiah who will comfort, Christ the Saviour.

Advent is the approach to the threshold of mystery. Advent is the time of the Nativity Fast. Advent is the time of faith. Advent is the time of faith in Advent as the Second Coming of the Lord. Advent is the expectation of “coming with glory to judge the living and the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ”, as it says in the Creed.

The pre-Christmas season has two faces: sadness and joy. And if the meagre expression of this time begins exactly forty days before Christmas in the tradition of fasting, then the joyful, festive anticipation of Christmas receives its first revelation in the Solemnity of the Presentation of Mary, the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos, which the



Peter Paul Rubens. Adoration of the Magi. 1628–1629

Church celebrates on 4 December. On this day, according to tradition, the Church celebrates the Presentation, or in modern language, the first visit of the infant Mary to the Temple of God in Jerusalem. A visit that became a dedication when she herself was consecrated to God.

Like the run-up to Christmas, the feast of the Presentation itself has two sides: joyful and sad. The joyful side of the holiday is the approach of Christmas. At the same time, the Feast is a journey through time. Moving through history. Diving into the special world of the old glorious church of the New Rome – Constantinople. At that time, when the political capital of the Christian world, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the city of cities, had at its heart the temple of Hagia Sophia, an architectural wonder, the temple erected by the Emperor Justinian (482–565)

who exclaimed, “I have defeated you, Solomon!”

Orthodox services line up around the Hagia Sophia. From there it spread as the standard for the entire empire and thus the universe. The kings of Constantinople saw themselves as successors to the Kings of Israel. At that time, rites were written, liturgical texts were introduced in honour of the righteous major and minor prophets of the Old Testament.

The liturgical texts of the Feast of Presentation are the incarnation of this Byzantine worldview. The perception of sacred things was due to this. The Byzantines or, as they called themselves, the “Romaioi”, (Romans), saw themselves as successors to the great biblical cause: the Temple, the Covenant, Sacred History. The glorious church, the most beautiful worship on earth, the temple

in which God Himself dwells in the Sancta Sanctorum. The introduction of the young lady Mary into the sanctuary – what could be more right, and just, or better!

But if you suddenly forget the Byzantine Empire, another side of the same story is revealed. On earth, in the Old Testament – and in all human history – there was only one temple recognised by God. This was the temple in Jerusalem. One Temple in History. This Temple was inviolable and holy. The Holy of Holies was in it.

Mary, the Mother of God, is introduced into this temple. It is the great beginning for Her. But for the temple it meant the end – abolition, conclusion of its history. Since then, there will be no more temple on earth. Never in the history of mankind. The introduction to the temple of the Virgin as a farewell. The intro-

duction to the temple as a farewell for the temple itself...

The New Testament is coming. And everything that seemed great and holy before is abolished. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, never to be rebuilt. And the human being becomes the temple of God. That temple will be Mary entering the temple. Every person who is baptised and accepts the Eucharist becomes such a temple. "I will enter into them. I will walk in them. I will be their God" (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Cor. 6:16). This is what God himself predicted. God foretold that man would become a temple.

Every church is a meeting place. The Eucharist is celebrated in the church. In the church a person becomes the temple of God. The biblical Temple, the temple building, is no longer there. And this reality comes on the day of the holiday, that of the people who first became the temple, its dwelling place, and the Holy of Holies – their introduction into the temple is celebrated by the community today. The introduction as an icon of the world "here and now". The Lord is always preparing new things for us (cf. Rev 21.5). This new coming is described in the Book of Revelation. And the celebrated introduction becomes an image yet to come. Soon the Lord will return. A new heavenly Jerusalem will descend from heaven. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth have disappeared" (Revelation 21:1).

And the most important thing: in this New City, the heavenly Jerusalem that descends from heaven for the earth, the temple is no longer. "I have seen no temple in the city. Its temple is the Lord God Almighty Himself and the Lamb. For its consecration the city needs neither sun nor moon. It is flooded with the light of God's glory; its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 22–23).

Our temple, the temple of peace and the temple of the universe, the temple of the Church will become...

the Lord God himself. In the beginning the temple was a building. And this temple is now abolished. Today the young lady Mary becomes the temple, so that because of this gift we become the temple. Christ will soon return so that He Himself and our Father God can become the temple. "Both the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" (Rev. 22.17).

In the Creed, the community that proclaims its faith in the Church calls her "apostolic". This means that the memory of the apostles is of great importance to the community. Therefore, on the commemoration day of St. Andrew the Apostle on 13 December –perhaps theologically most important commemoration of the saints of the entire Christmas season – we are called to reflect on the apostolicity of the Church.

The Apostle Andrew is called the "first-called" because, according to the Gospel, he was first called by the Lord to follow him (John 1:40–41). In John's Gospel, it was Andrew who told the Lord, "There are five fish and two fry, but what is this multitude?" (John 6.9). In Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 24.3) and Mark's (Mark 13.3), when the Lord was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, "Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him alone when it would be and what sign when? all this must be done" (13.4). As the Lord prepared to celebrate his Passover on the cross in Jerusalem, Andrew and Philip proclaimed that the Greeks, i.e., the Gentiles, wanted to see the Messiah (Jn 12.21–22).



Apostle Philip on St. Isaac Cathedral. St. Petersburg

Tradition is also rich in testimonies about Andrew. Very early sources, for example, say that Andrew preached in the territory of modern Greece, among other places. Here, for calling to faith in Christ the wife of the procurator of Achaia, in the north of the Peloponnese, he was crucified on a cross made of two beams in the shape of the letter "X". This cross is called "St. Andrew's Cross". According to the testimony of tradition, the crucified Andrew remained alive for two days and preached from the cross. Those who crucified him wanted to remove the apostle, but he gave up his spirit in the rays of the Divine Light, like the Saviour in the Divine darkness of the darkened sun.

Subsequently, in the countries where Andrew preached, new states arose, new peoples came. Each of them, including Russia, considers Andrew as their patron and apostle. By calling the Church apostolic, we are called to reflect on the meaning of this word.

– The apostolicity of the Church means that it was not only founded by the Apostles but has also preserved the continuity of pastoral and priestly ministry passed on directly and continuously from the apostles through the laying on of hands and prayer.

– The apostolicity of the Church is the original Christian and patristic conviction that those local churches which were founded directly by the apostles and mainly by Peter cannot err and sin in the truth.

– The apostolicity of the Church means that everything the Church teaches and holds concerning faith and morality was determined by the Apostles. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be subtracted from it. "If anyone adds anything, God will inflict plagues on him; if anyone takes away from the words of this prophecy, God will take away his participation in the book of life", says the Scripture (cf. Rev. 22: 18–19).

– The apostolicity of the Church, and this is very important, is also its poverty. "The multitude of the faithful had one heart and one soul; and none of their possessions called their own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 4:32).

– The apostolicity of the Church means its readiness for mission. Readiness here and now, at all times of the day and night, in every corner of the world, to proclaim the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of us were born and lived at a time when the New Year was celebrated as if time could give life. They waited for the coming of the new year, a new, renewed time, just as probably the first Christians awaited the return of the Lord Jesus every Sunday, the Lord's Day.

According to the conviction of the first believers in Christ, the Lord Jesus was inevitably to return. Return unexpectedly to catch the unsuspecting world that is not waiting for Him. Return to shut down and thus complete history and time.

Now that we have come to God and Jesus Christ and gained faith, we know that time does not give life. It erases people, acquaintances and strangers, our relatives, and friends from the pages of life. It erases as a broom, sweeps away cities and peoples, countries, and civilisations. It takes away what is most precious and dearest, and erases parts of ourselves.

There is a certain irrevocability in the celebration of the New Year. On the days before Christmas, as we prepare for the coming of the New Year, we will remember in prayer those who are not with us. Let us remember those who have left us and remain forever in the last decade and the first year of the past, already new, third decade of the century.

Remembering those, who are remembered by few or no one, gives us

hope that one day we too will be remembered. Our little prayer becomes part of the prayer of the Church which – we almost always forget this biblical truth – is the prayer of the Lord Jesus.

The prayer of the Lord Jesus is the prayer of the One who gave Himself for the salvation of the world, for the salvation of all, to deliver us from the "present evil time" (cf. Gal. 1.4). The Lord's prayer to His Father for us can only be heard (cf. Heb. 7.24–25).

The Lord Jesus draws nearer with every moment. He comes back to give us back what once time took away from us. And in the feeling of Christmas anticipation in the New Year – but every real event and date, ecclesiastical or secular, is an Easter event – we call on Him to return.

Therefore, on New Year's Eve, together with the whole Church, and thus with all who have left us but retain their voice in Christ Jesus, the whole world cries out in the words of the Apocalypse: "Hey, come, Lord Jesus! show us the clear river of the water of life!" (Rev. 22,20).



Nikolay Lomtev. St. Andrew erects a cross on Kiev heights. 1848

RUSSIAN IMPRESSIONIST

160 years since the birth of Konstantin Korovin

By OKSANA KOPENKINA,
art analyst, founder of the Arts Diary & Pad website

Konstantin Korovin introduced a new aesthetic to Russian art – impressionism. More than that – he became the leader of Russian impressionism.

Certainly, we can observe periods of interest to this genre in works of other Russian artists, such as Valentin Serov and even Ilya Repin (who was a dedicated realist). Despite that, only Korovin continued being loyal to impressionism his whole life. His journey to that genre is very interesting.

If you are not familiar with Korovin's biography, you might wonder, "It is obvious, the artist visited Paris and was impressed by French artists' style, so he brought it to Russia." Interestingly, such a suggestion would not be right. Korovin's first works in impressionism style were made a few years before his first visit to France.

His work "Chorus girl" is made according to all impressionism rules. Distinct, obvious brushstrokes. Carelessness and ease of painting. Even the pose of the lady is "impressionistic" – she is relaxed and laid back.

Notice that the signature and date are different. Art historians have always wondered how Korovin was able to create such a masterpiece at the age of 22. It is supposed by historians that Korovin intentionally made us inquire about this, by signing an earlier date on the painting. By that, he gained a status of a first Russian impressionist, creating pieces in that style long before his colleagues. Even so, the fact remains that Korovin started experimenting with impressionism before he had visited France.



Konstantin Korovin. Chorus girl. 1883

In 1875 Korovin was accepted into the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. His first teacher there was Alexey Savrasov. He did not object to his students' experiments with style. Even when Korovin painted "River in Men-shov". Large space, light all over the canvas, and not one sharp line. No descriptiveness, only mood expression. Such style was very unusual for Russian visual art of the period since realists were praised and looked up to. The art of that time revolved around details, concrete plot, and formal figures.



Konstantin Korovin. In the boat. 1888

In 1885, Korovin met Savva Mamontov, who invited Korovin to decorate theatre plays. Scenography, undoubtedly, affected his works. For example, in one of his famous paintings "A Northern Idyll" we can notice how characters' silhouettes lack three-dimensionality. It seems like they are part of a flat scene decoration, included in a wide, three-dimensional landscape.

"A Northern Idyll" is a masterpiece, created under influence of theatre work. However, Alexander Benua, an art historian, claimed that Korovin wastes his talent on subordinate jobs like theatre decorations and that it would be better for him to focus on his unique style.

Korovin enjoyed staying at a fellow artist Vasily Polenov's summerhouse at Zhukovka. His great work "At the Tea-Table" was created there, at which we can see Polenov's friends and family.

It is remarkable to see how every detail on that painting is depicted in true impressionistic style. On the right, there is an empty chair, pushed back. As if the artist stood up and immediately captured what was happening. And those who were at the table did not even pay attention to it. They are busy with their affairs and conversations. No posing. Only a moment of life, captured and immortalized by the artist.

The painting "In the Boat" was also created in Zhukovka. The work shows the artist Polenov and his wife's sister Maria Yakunchenkova, also an artist.

The painting can be viewed endlessly, while feeling the slow movement of water and the rustle of leaves.

Post-revolutionary Russia was not a very favourable place for Korovin. Listening to the advice of Anatoly Lunacharsky (one of the co-leaders of new Russia), the artist moved to Paris in 1923.

Korovin painted Paris selflessly. His brushstrokes seem to fall into a whirlwind, forming a colourful mass, where we can barely distinguish figures, shadows, windows of houses. Literally one step to abstraction, just pure emotions without admixture of the real world.



Konstantin Korovin. Parisian cafe. 1890

Unlike many impressionists, Korovin never gave up black paint, sometimes using it very profusely. For example, in the painting "Italian Boulevard".

Once in Paris, while Korovin was painting on the street, a Russian couple stopped to watch the artist's work. The man commented that the French are very strong in colour. To which Korovin retorted "The Russians are not worse!"

He was in the centre of secular society, worked a lot, painted. However, Russian artist Evgeny Lansere recalled that he once met Korovin at an exhibition in Paris. Korovin was stating by some Russian landscape, bursting into tears, lamenting that he would never see Russian birch trees again. Korovin was full of prolific sadness about leaving Russia.

The artist's life ended in Paris on 11 September 1939.

TRADITIONS

CHRISTMAS MARKETS IN ENGLAND

By NICOLA CAMERON

Festive atmosphere, fabulous gifts and twinkling lights – Christmas markets are one of England's fondest traditions. Set in some of the country's most picturesque cities, a visit to a Christmas market is equal parts shopping experience, equal parts destination discovery. Start planning your ultimate winter getaway to some of the country's best Christmas mar-

kets, as recommended by Visit England. all of which are ideal for a family day trip or a romantic night out.

Winter Wonderland
Hyde Park, London

Transforming one of London's most spectacular parks, Hyde Park

open air ice rink and plenty of bars and food stalls, there's something for all the family to enjoy. Don't miss jaw-dropping circus acts and creative ice sculpting workshops, and browse over 100 charming wooden chalets for unique gifts, festive decorations and culinary delights.

Also check out: The festive window displays at Hamleys, Selfridge's and



Photo: Arthur Edelmanns



Photo: Devon Rogers

Winter Wonderland offers a festive paradise in the heart of the city. Home to the world's tallest transportable observation wheel, a Magical Ice Kingdom and an array of thrilling fairground rides, along with the UK's largest

Harrods, plus the capital's festive lights around the shopping hubs of Regent's Street and Oxford Street.

Bath Christmas Market
Abbey Churchyard, Bath

For historic-ambience-meets-winter-style, head to Bath Christmas



Photo: Sam Headland

Market, as pop-up chalets set up on the city's pretty Georgian streets. Visitors can expect a real treasure trove of gifts to take home, whether that's jewellery, homewares or decorations. This year, due to staff shortages, there will be a smaller number of chalets setting up shop around Bath Abbey and Abbey Green, with the vast majority run by local suppliers from Bath and south-west England. On top of savvy shopping, you'll find a festive fairground (with a Victorian carousel ride) and lots of street entertainment. If you can't attend in person, the organisers will also be setting up a Virtual Market so you can grab some goodies online.

Also check out: Bath on Ice, the fes-

tive ice rink; the Christmas Trail at Prior Park Landscape Garden during December

Birmingham Frankfurt Christmas Market

Victoria Square, Birmingham

A firm favourite on the city's yuletide calendar, Birmingham Frankfurt Christmas Market is the largest authentic German Christmas market outside of Germany or Austria. Expect a fine range of traditional, personalised gifts and products on its 80 stalls and get into the German spirit while feasting on schnitzels, bratwursts, glühwein and weissbeer.

Another huge draw is its bandstand location in Victoria Square and the programme of live music and carol singers that bring the party atmosphere to festive shopping.

Also check out: Outdoor skating at Ice Rink Birmingham plus the Big Wheel Experience, or head to Enchanted Weston – an illuminated, after-dark experience in stunning parkland with live music and food.

Southbank Winter Festival

Southbank Centre, London

The popular Winter Market returns to London's Southbank Centre, a seasonal pleasure that sits along-



Photo: Leeds City Council

side a range of family shows and festive fun as the banks of the River Thames become a winter wonderland. All along the South Bank are strings of decorations and cute illuminated wooden cabins selling Christmas gifts, from the quirky to the traditional, as well as mince pies, spiced cider and steaming mugs of mulled wine and hot chocolate. Make sure to grab a selfie by the huge Christmas tree!

Also check out: The fantastic performances available at the Southbank Centre, from Christmas concerts and choir performances to a children's retelling of Black Beauty and circus entertainment with Circus 1903.

Leeds Christmas Market

Millennium Square, Leeds

Millennium Square in Leeds is transformed for the city's annual German Christmas Market, with the

addition of more than 40 traditionally decorated wooden chalets. Browse through hand-crafted jewellery and festive decorations, tuck into authentic German food and feel extra festive with a ride on the popular Christmas Carousel. For those still feeling hungry, visit the Alp Chalet restaurant in the centre of the market, a Bavarian style eatery offering a delectable selection of traditional food and drink, alongside evening entertainment.

Also check out: Thor's Tipi in Victoria Gardens, a pop-up tipi bar offering an array of winter warming drinks; the massed voices of Inspiration Choir as they join forces with the Orchestra of Opera North for Inspiration: A Christmas Extravaganza at Leeds Town Hall; and the Leeds Playhouse festive production of The Night Before Christmas.

Manchester Christmas Markets

Albert Square, Manchester

The latest instalment of the Manchester Christmas Markets will take

over locations across the city from mid-November, meaning visitors won't be far from festive gifts and delicious food and drink stalls selling traditional bratwurst, hog roast, paella and much more. There will be more than 300 stalls and chalets across the city, with the heart of the markets found in Albert Square. Visitors can follow the trail and pick up jewellery, toys, plants, bags, homeware and fun, quirky gifts at a variety of markets, including a French market, a German market, a World Christmas market and a dedicated Arts & Crafts market.

Also check out: Winter Funland, which will be held at an indoor venue and include fairground attractions, an ice rink, a circus and other fun performances; Halle's (Manchester's Orchestra's) Christmas Concerts at Bridgewater Hall and Ice Village Manchester, the UK's biggest-ever ice attraction which includes an Arctic Tiki Bar, Santa's Grotto and an ice rink.

Winchester Christmas Market

Winchester Cathedral

With its unique location in the shadow of a celebrated English icon, Winchester Cathedral's Christmas Market is widely regarded as one of Europe's best. More than 100 chalets are home to hand-picked exhibitors offering exclusive gifts that visitors won't find on the high street – from hand-crafted decorations and festive treats to craft beer and mulled wine.

Also check out: Skate around the city's covered Christmas Ice Rink and marvel at the glittering Christmas tree in its centre; or visit the

Ginchester Christmas Market (7 December 2019), a celebration of the region's diverse spirits including local gin, whisky, vodka and rum.

The Victorian Christmas Festival *Portsmouth Historic Dockyard*

Travel back in time for three days of festive fun at the Victorian Christmas Festival, held in the impressive surroundings of the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. This year marks 20 years of Christmas magic, with the festival home to 120 market stalls selling all sorts of festive treats, an array of Victorian street performers and the chance to meet Father Christmas.

Also check out: Mix up a treat as the Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower hosts two Christmas Cocktail Parties; Meet Father Christmas at



Photo: Visit Hampshire

the Royal Navy Submarine Museum and enjoy lashings of festive fun during the That'll Be the Day Christmas Show at Kings Theatre.

Lincoln Christmas Market *Cathedral Quarter, Lincoln*

This three-day market sets up shop for its fleeting run at Lincoln's Cathedral Quarter. There will be 280 Bavarian-themed stalls selling a range of unique festive trinkets alongside a wide selection of hearty food, drink and fairground rides. Shops across the city stay open later when the market's in town too, giving you plenty of time to get all your gifts. Got the kids in tow? Well make sure to stop by St Paul in the Bail where the little ones

can write and decorate their letters to Santa, and even post them to him using the huge Christmas Postbox.

Also check out: The magical Illuminated Wall Walk at Lincoln Castle; the special advent services and concerts at Lincoln Cathedral; family-friendly days out at Rand Farm Park, with an enchanted forest and Santa himself; and the Lantern Parade and nativity play at Castle Hill.

York's St Nicholas Christmas Fair *Parliament Street, York*

Soak up medieval charm at York's award-winning Christmas fair. Alpine-style chalets take pride of place at the centre of Parliament Street, offering up an array of festive decorations, foodie treats and traditional Christmas gifts. For local Yorkshire



York's St Nicholas Christmas Fair

Photo: Annie Sprat

produce, head for the Make in Yorkshire Yuletide Village, and for all the fun of the fair, fly down the Victorian-style Helter Skelter at Kings Square. After all that excitement you'll be in need of a tippie or two, so stop by the rustic barn in St Sampson's Square for a glass of mulled wine and a cup of hot chestnuts.

Also check out: Meet Father Christmas on the Kirklees Light Railway; have a giggle at Scrooge The Musical, playing at the Grand Opera House, and skate around a 30-foot-high Christmas tree at Yorkshire's Winter Wonderland.

Rochester Christmas Market *Rochester, Kent*

Attracting more than 130,000 visitors a year, this Kent-based market is sure to fill more than a few stockings. Nestled in Rochester's Castle Gardens, you can browse a range of chalet-style stalls selling everything from Fair-trade clothing to dog toys and homemade jams. And head over to the Bavarian food village for some bratwurst or churros (very German, we know!) before letting loose on some good old-fashioned fairground rides. The market also happens to coincide with the Dickensian Christmas Festival, where you'll be able to feast your eyes on Victorian delights, meet costumed characters and listen to some open-air carolling.

Also check out: Discover how the Victorians started our festive traditions at Eastgate House; or grab your nineteenth century ball

gown and attend the Mistletoe Ball, part of the Dickensian Christmas Festival.

Norwich Christmas Markets and Events *Norwich, Norfolk*

Norwich isn't content with just one Christmas market, so it hosts several. Taking place across the same week-end in December, three distinct fairs open for business across the city. The largest, Norwich Global Village Christmas Market, takes over The Forum, with indoor stalls selling the region's finest crafts, paintings and gifts. And on Saturday, you'll be able to tuck into French crêpes, mulled wine and posh hot dogs just outside The Forum's doors. Over in the Cathedral, Norwich Christmas Fayre will be filled with more festive joy and goodies, while at Open Norwich, the Vegan Christmas Market will be in full swing with a range of cruelty-free products and delicious vegan food.

Also check out: The Tunnel of Light – Norwich's most-visited Christmas attraction; the breath-taking Thursford Christmas Spectacular; A Circus Carol (an acrobatic reimagining of Dickens' festive tale); and the community-organised Christmas Tree Festival.

Skipton Christmas Market *Skipton, Yorkshire*

Head up, down or over to Yorkshire to check out an award-winning market home to over 100 fantastic stalls. Alongside the mass of goodies up for grabs along the High Street, there will be festive entertainment galore, including live brass bands and

Christmas choirs. For the kids there will be hands-on craft activities and opportunities to say hello to Santa and his reindeer. And at the end of the day, once the traders have started packing away, there'll be a chance to join the torchlight procession through the town.

Also check out: The one-of-a-kind winter hideaway at the Off Piste Pop-up Alpine Restaurant; The interactive Great Christmas Dig at The Richard Whiteley Theatre; and the



Norwich Christmas Lights

Photo: Visit Norwich

Toddler Christmas Parties at Thornton Hall Country Park

Padstow Christmas Festival *Padstow, Cornwall*

Food is at the heart of Padstow's Christmas Festival, championed by high-profile chefs like Rick Stein and Paul Ainsworth. Join them, and more than 60 culinary experts, at cooking demonstrations across the four-day event that showcases the best of British food and drink. The Christmas marquee market is also the best place to pick up some of the most celebrated West Country produce – from beers to beauty products and art. You can even stop by the festival's literary talks and book signings – the perfect place to bag yourself an early Christmas pressie.

Also check out: Lantern making and festive feasts at Bodmin's Winter Wonderland; mince pies and carol singing at The Pickwick Inn's Pickwick Christmas Carols.

Stratford-upon-Avon Victorian Christmas Market *Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire*

Returning for its third year is Stratford-upon-Avon's award-win-



Padstow Christmas Festival

ning Victorian Christmas Market, taking place in the town centre once again. With over 100,000 visitors last year, the ever-popular event spreads festive cheer with masses of shopping, food and street entertainment.

Around 300 stalls, complete with Victorian outfit-clad tradespeople, will be selling a wide range of gifts and seasonal products, and over on Wood Street there'll be a traditional funfair to keep the whole family entertained.

This year will also welcome the Community Craft Fair, located in Stratford Town Council's Town Hall on Sheep Street.

Also check out: Traditional winter blooms and 'Wassailing' at Christmas at Shakespeare's Birthplace; meet Father Christmas at the Jacobean Hall's Croft.

ESSENTIALLY FRENCH: CHRISTMAS GIFTS WITH A TWIST

By CHARLOTTE CHIRON

Christmas shopping? Don't worry about the annual headache. This year, make yourself (and others) happy with ideas from these passionate artisans, most of whom boast the label of *Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant*, or living heritage enterprise. All share the appreciation for quality workmanship and strike a balance between traditional *savoir-faire* and modern style. From Brittany to the Côte d'Azur, here's a quick tour of France in gifts to help you find something precious to place under the Christmas tree.

Wool from Provence

In Isle-sur-la-Sorgue in Provence, over eight passionate generations have passed down the secrets of making shawls, scarves, and blankets. Respecting traditional workmanship and constantly innovating, the designers Brun de Vian-Tiran travel the



Photo: Claire Curt. Find natural warmth with these "Yaka" throws, woven from fine, soft yak hair

world in search of the most beautiful fibers for their exceptional creations. What's better than something warm and cozy under the Christmas tree?

Crystal from Alsace

Alsace, the cradle of glassworks for over a century, is also well known for its Lalique crystalware, which continues artisanal glass working traditions, while innovating with modern collections. With its jewelry, crystal, and



more recently, home design, there's no doubt that you can find a timeless gift for anyone here.

Wax from Vendée

Five generations have sustained this artisanal family business in Vendée, sharing their unique, traditional know-how in the making of their Bougies La Française candles. With a variety of collections (like "vintage" or "forest"), shapes, and



Photo: Bougies La Française. A deliciously old-fashioned design from the Bougies La Française's Vintage Collection

Photo: Lalique. Age-old *savoir-faire* at Lalique, in Alsace

scents, there is a candle for everyone. These are real crowd-pleasers to slide under the tree.

Recycled cardboard from Paris

A play oven with rounded design, a toy storage bin shaped like a croc-



Photo: Carton Lune. Cardboard gets a second life at Carton Lune

odile, child-sized furniture, and even a kit to build your own guitar: there's something for everyone at Carton Lune, whose workshop is in Montreuil, just outside of Paris. All items are made from recycled cardboard, and the designer also creates bespoke pieces. Here you can find an original, sustainable holiday gift that's good for the environment.

Porcelain from Limoges

Limoges, the porcelain capital, is the birthplace of an exceptional *savoir-faire*, like that proven by Maison Bernardaud, established in 1863. This family business collaborates with passionate artisans to create extraordinary objects to dress up even the prettiest holiday table settings.



Photo: LilyRose / Bernardaud. Finesse and refinement defines the "Collection Venise"

Their porcelain jewelry range is just as remarkable, each piece making for an elegant, refined gift.

Soap from Marseille

Savonnerie du Fer à Cheval is upholding more than 150 years of traditional Marseille soap production. Using this certified soap follows the trend of consuming more durable, natural products. Whether you prefer the traditional bar of soap, the liquid version or the flakes, the virtues of Marseille soap remain the same:



Photo: Savonnerie du Fer à Cheval. This soap, created in cauldrons using a traditional five-step method, is made of exclusively of vegetable oils

its highly effective and good for the skin. These soaps are useful and environmentally friendly gifts.

Perfume from Grasse

Maison Molinard, in Grasse, has been combining tradition with modernity, and luxury with authenticity for more than 150 years. This passion and age-old know-how have been passed on for five generations, creating a range of elegant, original scents. Whether someone is more spicy or floral, or prefers



Photo: Molinard. Molinard has been seducing perfume lovers for more than 150 years.

more fresh or woody scents, this is a chic, classy gift for any taste.

Cutlery from Dordogne

The oldest French knives produced by talented artisans are created in Dordogne, in the small town of Nontron. Staying true to traditional technique and *savoir-faire*, *Coutellerie Nontronnaise* has nonetheless evolved in its design, diversifying and creating new ranges for knife enthusiasts. A great gift for those who enjoy authentic, timeless pieces.



Photo: Coutellerie Nontronnaise. These elegant white and black knives designed by Olivier Gagnère give tradition a modern, sophisticated twist

Wood from Brittany

Learning while having fun, that's the mission behind Arthur et Marie, who have been creating educational games from 100% French origin wood since 1985. Today, they offer some 150 models of games and solid, durable objects inspired by ancient and contemporary art – a natural way to awaken the senses for the little ones.



TRAVEL

FIVE TOP LUXURY DESTINATIONS IN FINLAND

By MIRVA SAUKKOLA

For Finns, luxury rarely means glitter and grand logos. Instead, we appreciate high quality and unforgettable experiences. You can easily find them all over the country – from winter to summer and spring to autumn.

For most visitors to our land of a thousand lakes, the pure Finnish air and the unspoiled nature represent the greatest luxury. Sometimes you wish, however, to indulge. Here are the five best locations to experience luxury with a Finnish twist, according to Visit Finland.

Helsinki – luxury hotels, iconic cafés and more

In the heart of the capital of Finland it is not a demanding task to find a five-star pillow under your head. The hotel scene of Helsinki is booming and new hotels are opened regularly. One of the newest ones is Hotel St. George, which also has a luxurious spa with relaxation pool. This modern and chic hotel is filled with eye-pampering art from world famous artists, like world-famous Chinese contemporary artist Ai Wei Wei. If you would rather admire a sea view, head to Hotel Haven. This classy boutique hotel offers a wonderful view to the Russian-style Uspenski cathedral for the lucky hotel guest. To start your day in a truly elegant way, try Haven's delicious breakfast in the grand 19th century dining room. Right at the heart of the city you can find Hotel Kämp – a true icon of Helsinki's small but fiery luxury hotel landscape.

Did you know that Finns drink more coffee per capita than any other

nation in the world? Most of it is consumed as ordinary filter coffee in homes but why not try a more sophisticated coffee break? Visit the most traditional café of the city, Ekberg, which has served cake lovers ever since from 1852. Or try Chez Janet, which reminds you with its pastel-colored interior and sweet macarons of the feasts of Marie Antoinette. As they say, luxury is in the details.

Porvoo – historic charm and culinary treats

The tiny town of Porvoo is a medieval pearl situated less than 50 kilometres from the center of Helsinki. It is as cozy in the summer as it is during Christmas time. But if you decide to make a trip there in summertime, we suggest doing it in a old-world style with M/S J. L. Runeberg – a ship built in 1912 and named after the Finnish

national poet, who used to live in Porvoo. The grand ship takes you to your destination through the stunningly beautiful Finnish archipelago. Sail away and enjoy the landscape and a bowl of delicious salmon soup.

Porvoo is a foodie's paradise packed with high-quality restaurants. One of the most popular ones is Sicapelle, which combines Italian flavours with local ingredients. The lady behind the delicious recipes is the head chef Simona Milazzo. Or try Salt. This easy-going restaurant with dividend portions is located next to the church in an old log building with unforgettable atmosphere.

After hard shopping, dining and wining we all need rest. Get it in style and book a room from Pariisin Ville, an elegant boutique hotel named after the Belle Époque sculptor Ville Vallgren who once upon a time shared his time between Porvoo and Paris. In the luxurious Aleksan-



Orthodox Uspenski Cathedral in Katajanokka, Helsinki

terin Sviitti, you can sleep like the emperor, because in this very same house Alexander I of Russia lived during the parliament meeting of Porvoo in 1809.

Tampere – jazz age meets vintage gems

Tampere, the third biggest city of Finland, is mainly known for its industrial red brick architecture and rock music scene, but if you seek for luxury with a Finnish twist, you will not be disappointed. A fabulous place to stay is Radisson Blu Grand Hotel Tammer, which is situated beautifully by the Tammer river. Take a step inside and you can feel as if you would have entered Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot mystery. The interior of the beautiful art deco hotel, built in 1929, takes you back to age of jazz. Don't pass the spectacular dining room where you can enjoy tasty meals made of local products under the crystal chandeliers.

Tampere is well-known for its popular museums, like the Moomin Museum, which is especially loved among the Japanese fans of the famous Finnish cuddly cartoon characters. A hidden museum gem for a luxury traveler is Milavida, an elegant stone villa surrounded by a green park. The building served originally as a wealthy manufacturer family of von Nottbeck. In addition to the home museum, which tells about upper class life during the age of Belle Époque, the museum offers a location for visiting exhibitions, often associated with fashion. There is also a café in the museum.

For vintage shoppers, Tampere is a small haven. Vintage Garden is favored by ladies who love feminine dresses and bold jewelry. Helga-Neiti offers contemporary, high-quality second-hand fashion with brands like Max Mara, Hugo Boss and Marimekko. Or visit Kätkö Vintage, where you can also find interior design bargains, such as old glassware and ceramics.

Lahti – music, meals and modern tastes

The city of Lahti, one hour north of Helsinki by train, is small Lakeland city known for sports events, especially winter sports.

But nowadays it also boasts one of the finest concert halls in the country: Sibelius Hall. The hall located by the beautiful Lake Vesijärvi, hosts both classical and pop music concerts. The impressive building combines old factory architecture with modern, wooden structures.

In addition to music, you can enjoy culinary treats in Lahti. Try Roux, an elegant yet cozy restaurants which blends Scandinavian and French influences. It is also well-known for its excellent wine cellar. Or visit Bistro Popot – a name referring to shoes because of a shoe shop that was located in the same address for decades. Bistro Popot offers modern tastes made of local ingredients.

Shoppers go to destination is Petit St. Louis. This cute little boutique sells hip and trendy clothes, alluring fragrances by Byredo and Diptyque as well as Charbonnel & Walker chocolates.

Savonlinna and Lake Saimaa – luxury in the midst of nature

Savonlinna, a Lakeland town in Eastern Finland, turns into the opera capital of Finland with the annual Savonlinna Opera Festival held in July. The medieval castle of Olavinlinna has offered breathtaking setting for the operas ever since 1912. Remember to reserve both your ticket and



hotel room well ahead of the festival as Savonlinna tends to be packed during the opera festival with both Finns and international visitors.

Nothing to wear for the big opera night? Even though Savonlinna is a small town, many designers, such as the Grand Old Man of Finnish fashion Mr. Jukka Rintala, open pop up shops during the opera festival. The Finnish fashion brand Muotikuu also has a shop permanently in Savonlinna. Muotikuu is especially well-known for its knitwear which is perfect for chilly Finnish summer nights.

The most elegant place to sleep by Lake Saimaa is located 30 kilometres from Savonlinna in the small town of Punkaharju. Hotel Punkaharju is the oldest hotel in Finland founded already in 1845. It pampers guests from locals to presidents with stunning scenery, cozy rooms and delicious food made of local ingredients. The owner, ex-supermodel Saimi Hoyer is a specialist in wild mushrooms and therefore you can always find them in the menu.

UNBOXING CREATIVITY IN THE UK

Ten spectacular creative projects will demonstrate the British nation's talent in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths

By ELLA LARINA

Unboxed: Creativity in the UK is a major festival that will place in 2022 featuring ten creative projects across the UK that people will be able to visit in person or experience through traditional broadcast and digital media.

Unboxed will bring together some of the UK's brightest talents in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths to work on jaw-dropping projects that will champion the nation's creative ability, give people memorable days out and support tourism and local economies.

The festival, backed by £120 million of government funding, will touch all corners of the UK, with projects moving to different locations across the UK to reach as big an audience as possible.

Combined with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, next year will be one of pride, celebration and coming together for the nation following the Covid-19 pandemic.

"From the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, 2022 is going to be a year of celebrating the UK at its best," said the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

He added that Unboxed will be a celebration of UK ingenuity, energy, innovation, optimism and all-round creative genius, it will be unlike anything else that has been seen before.

"Light shows, sculpture trails and a festival of ideas are just some of the spectacular events that will take

place in locations across the UK – alongside work and experiences you can interact with digitally," the Prime Minister said.

The programme of events will also engage hundreds of thousands of school children, young people and communities throughout 2022 through school outreach and other



ways to take part. There will be volunteering roles to be filled and Unboxed will create employment and training opportunities for people involved.

Unboxed will kick off in March with the incredible 'About Us' installation beginning in Paisley, before touring locations including Derry-Londonderry, Caernarfon, Luton and Hull. Featuring a spectacular sound and vision show, 'About Us' will take audiences on a journey through time and space – from the Big Bang to the present day – exploring the earth's history and people's connections to one another. Renowned musician

Nitin Sawhney has composed a score for the show that will be performed by local choirs in host towns and cities. There will also be a UK-wide schools' poetry and computer coding competition, launched today.

Across Scotland, the 'Dandelion' project will feature Unexpected Gardens, vertical farms, free music events and plant giveaways to reimagine the annual harvest festival for the 21st Century, from Caithness to Dumfries.

In Wales, 'GALWAD', which means 'call' in Welsh, is a story set thirty years in the future which will unfold across TV drama, digital platforms and live events in three Welsh locations – Blaenau Ffestiniog, Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea – over seven days.

In Northern Ireland, 'Our Place in Space' will be a 10km scale model sculpture trail of the solar system that has been designed by children's author and artist Oliver Jeffers. People will be able to visit it in person in Derry-Londonderry, Belfast Divis and the Black Mountain, Cambridge and Ulster Transport Museum or through augmented reality.

'Tour De Moon' will be a series of festivals, satellite events and nightlife experiences inspired by the Moon. Young creative talent aged 18 to 25 will be involved in creating the programme that will include music, filmmaking and debate. It will take place across Leicester, Newcastle, Southampton and satellite events across England.



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