Issue 3 - 2SLGBTQIA+ Seasonal 2026

BUZZworthy

queering the holidays



In This Issue
Holiday Giving, Holiday Traditions, Holiday Science, and Holiday Treats + Gift Ideas



A Holiday HELLO

from the publisher

There's something rather wonderful about putting together a magazine that exists for one simple reason: to celebrate the holidays.

When we first created BUZZworthy, it was conceived primarily as a holiday shopping guide—a festive place to discover gift ideas, businesses and a little inspiration for the season. Three editions in, something else has started to happen. BUZZworthy is finding its own personality.

And I think you'll see a lot of that personality in the pages ahead.

We wanted this year's issue to feel like something you could actually enjoy during the holidays. Something light. Something interesting. Something you might flip through with a coffee in the morning, a glass of wine in the evening or while hiding from everyone for fifteen minutes because you've had quite enough holiday togetherness for one day.

This year, we begin with The Holidays Are for Giving, looking beyond the presents under the tree at the time, kindness and support we can give to others, along with a selection of community organizations and ways you can support the work they do.

Then we're off Around the World in 31 Days, discovering how different cultures celebrate the season and some of the traditions that make this time of year special in different corners of the globe.

In There's Science Behind That?, we get curious about the very real research behind some surprisingly familiar holiday experiences—from the smells and songs that transport us back in time to family rituals, shared meals, gift giving and even those twinkling lights.

And because celebrating tends to make us hungry and thirsty, Eat, Drink & Be Mary brings together festive cocktails, merry mocktails and seasonal treats to pour, nibble and share.



Of course, our BUZZworthy Horoscope is back to see what the stars might have waiting for you as we say goodbye to one year and get ready for another.

Throughout the issue, you'll also find plenty of gift ideas and businesses to discover. I hope you'll consider supporting the advertisers who make BUZZworthy possible and the businesses that help keep our communities vibrant.

Mostly, though, I hope you enjoy yourself.

The holidays can become incredibly busy. Somewhere between the shopping, decorating, cooking, parties and trying to remember where you hid that gift you bought three months ago because you were being so impressively organized, remember to leave a little time for the good stuff.

From all of us at BUZZworthy and INspired Media, I wish you a holiday season filled with laughter, kindness, good food, good people and whatever traditions make this time of year special to you.

Happy Holidays,

Antoine Elhashem

Antoine Elhashem is the president of INspired Media, the publishers of The Pink Pages Directory, PinkPlayMags and theBUZZ.

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The HOLIDAYS Are for Giving

2026









Because nothing looks better under the tree than a little kindness, a whole lot of love and maybe just a touch of holiday sparkle.There is something about the holidays that brings out the giver in us.

Maybe it's all those twinkling lights. Maybe it's the music. Maybe it's the sight of beautifully wrapped presents piled under a tree. Or maybe, somewhere between the parties, the fabulous outfits, the food and that one person who insists on putting Mariah Carey on repeat (and honestly, who are we to stop them?), we're simply reminded how good it feels to make someone else happy.

And really, isn't that one of the best parts of the season?

The holidays are for giving. They're also forgiving—or at least that's what we tell ourselves here at BUZZworthy after one too many holiday parties, several trips back to the buffet and the discovery that our favourite pants have somehow become a little less forgiving.

Giving is woven into almost every holiday tradition in one way or another. We exchange presents with the people we love. We bring something to the host. We bake for neighbours. We send cards to people we haven't seen nearly enough. We gather around tables, open our homes and find little ways of saying, I thought about you.

But some of the most meaningful gifts will never make it under the tree.They don't need ribbons. They don't come with gift receipts. And thankfully, you won't have to spend half an hour trying to remember where you hid them. (We've all been there). Sometimes the gift is simply you. (Yes, your fabulous self.)



Give a Little Time

December can be one of the busiest months of the year, which is exactly why giving someone a little of your time can mean so much.

Community organizations need volunteers. Food programs need helping hands. Events need people willing to pitch in. A neighbour may need some help. A friend who lives alone might appreciate company more than another present.

And giving your time doesn't necessarily mean committing yourself to every Saturday until spring. Sometimes it is an afternoon, an evening or a few hours helping an organization get through an especially busy season.

There are also people in our own lives who could use a little more of us. Call the relative you keep meaning to call. Invite someone who might otherwise spend the holidays alone. Check on a neighbour. Take somebody out for coffee.

Your calendar may be packed—possibly with more holiday parties than any reasonable person needs—but sometimes finding one empty square in it can be a pretty wonderful gift.

Give What You Can

Of course, money matters too.

Charitable and community organizations depend on donations to do their work, and the holidays are an important time to support them. But giving doesn't have to involve a giant cheque with photographers standing nearby. (Although if you have a giant cheque, darling, by all means.)

Five dollars helps. Twenty dollars helps. A monthly donation helps. And if your own budget is tight this year, there are plenty of other things organizations may need.

Food banks need food. Shelters may need toiletries and personal-care products. Winter clothing can help someone stay warm—because fabulous is considerably harder at -15°C. Some organizations collect toys, gift cards or household necessities. Others may have very specific needs, so before filling a bag with what you think they need, check their website or give them a call and find out what would actually be most useful.

Giving thoughtfully can make even a small contribution go further.

Give a Little Dignity

The holidays also make the inequalities around us particularly difficult to ignore.

On the same streets filled with decorated storefronts and people carrying shopping bags, others may be struggling with homelessness, hunger or simply trying to make it through another cold Canadian winter.

There is no single perfect way to respond. Some people are comfortable giving money directly. Others carry food, warm socks, gloves, transit fare or gift cards. Supporting organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness is another way to help. Whatever you choose, kindness costs nothing.

Look someone in the eye. Say hello. Treat people with the same dignity you would want for yourself. We sometimes become so accustomed to walking past people that we forget how powerful the simple act of acknowledging another human being can be.

Give Your Way

Perhaps the nicest thing about giving is that there really isn't one right way to do it. (Choice. We've always been rather fond of that.)

You can support young people. Seniors. Animals. Newcomers. People living with illness. Someone experiencing homelessness. A food program. An arts organization. A queer organization doing work you believe in. A cause halfway around the world or one operating three blocks from your front door.

You can volunteer. Donate. Fundraise. Advocate. Share an organization's work with your friends. Buy from a social enterprise. Drop something into a donation bin.

You can even make giving part of your own holiday traditions. Instead of another Secret Santa gift nobody particularly needs (yes, we're looking at you, novelty mug), make donations to causes you each care about. Volunteer together. Ask guests coming to your holiday party to bring an item for a local food bank. Get the kids involved and let them choose something they would like to give to another child.

There are countless ways to do some good, and none of them require you to save the world before New Year's Eve.



The holidays are supposed to be joyful. Giving should be too.

So while you're making your lists, checking them twice and hunting down that absolutely perfect something for the people you love, perhaps leave a little room on the list for someone you may never meet.

Because whether it comes wrapped in fabulous paper and an enormous bow or arrives as an hour of your time, a bag of groceries, a warm coat, a donation or a simple act of kindness, the spirit behind it is really the same:

I thought about you.

And that might just be one of the loveliest gifts we can give.





Share the Love

Community organizations you can support this holiday season

Looking for somewhere to start? On the following pages, we're sharing a selection of organizations doing important work in our communities and beyond, along with ways you can help support what they do.

It is only a sampling. There are thousands of organizations, groups and grassroots initiatives that could use a little extra love. Find the cause that speaks to you, look around your own community and give in whatever way feels right for you.

After all, there's plenty of holiday spirit to go around.

Authored by: theBUZZ ediorial team

Photo credits: Antoni Shkraba, RDNE, Kampusm Production, Julia M Cameron, Anna Shvets

SHARE THE LOVE

Feeling inspired to give a little back this holiday season but not quite sure where to start? We've got you. Across our communities, organizations large and small are doing incredible work every day—supporting youth, providing food and housing, caring for people living with illness, fighting bullying and discrimination, supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and helping people who simply need a hand.

We invited a selection of organizations to tell us a little about what they do and, most importantly, how you can help.

International Day of Pink

What they do: Creates safer, affirming communities for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth through free workshops and resources addressing bullying, homophobia, transphobia and discrimination.
How you can help: Donate, order campaign wear, host a tour event or use their free bilingual resources.

Website: dayofpink.org

Florens Foundation

What they do: Through the No Time for That Tour, artists and presenters visit communities across Canada to address bullying, mental health, empathy and belonging.
How you can help: Donate to help keep programming accessible and expand educational resources and community partnerships.

Website: florens.foundation

THRIVE HIV Prevetnion+ Support

What they do: Works to prevent HIV, hepatitis C and other infections while supporting people living with HIV through harm reduction and community programs.
How you can help: Donate funds or gently used clothing, volunteer or support THRIVE's fundraising events

Website: thrivehiv.ca

Fife House

What they do: Provides supportive housing and services to people and families experiencing housing precarity while living with HIV/AIDS.
How you can help: Donate, volunteer, organize a fundraiser or leave a holiday message for Fife House clients.

Website: fifehouse.org

Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention

What they do: Serves South Asian, Middle Eastern and Indo-Caribbean communities through HIV prevention, sexual health education, settlement services and LGBTQIA+ programming.
How you can help: Donate, volunteer, fundraise, partner with ASAAP or share its resources.

Website: asaap.ca

It Gets Better Canada

What they do: Uplifts and empowers 2SLGBTQI+ youth across Canada and works toward a future where every young person feels included and supported.
How you can help: Donate to help create a brighter, more hopeful future for 2SLGBTQI+ youth.

Website: itgetsbettercanada.org

ODLAN - Open Digital Literacy and Access Network

What they do: Advances digital inclusion through accessible resources, research, education and training for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.
How you can help: Shop, volunteer, attend a webinar, share their resources or partner with ODLAN for training..

Website: odlan.ca

Giving back doesn't have to be grand. A donation, a few hours of your time, sharing a resource or simply showing up can make a difference. There are countlessways to help strengthen the community we all share—and that may be one of the best gifts of all.

Gift Ideas for the foodie

JEWELS under the KILT



The Gift Idea: Give them something delicious to crack into! Jewels Under the Kilt's Party of Six Nut Trays bring together six varieties of their locally grown and roasted nuts—perfect for holiday snacking, sharing or gifting.

The Cost: $19.85, excluding GST/HST.

How to Order: Shop online at jewelsunderthekilt.com.

Nuts for Cheese



The Gift Idea: Give them the gift of stocking their fridge with dairy-free deliciousness. The Essentials Bundle includes six plant-based cheeses, an Original Cream Cheese and three creamy cashew dips—ready for cheeseboards, snacking, brunch and more.

The Cost: $105.

How to Order: Shop at nutsforcheese.com. Free Canada-wide shipping on orders over $75.

The Argyle and Malarkey



The Gift Idea: Give them a night out! A gift card for The Argyle or Malarkey lets them choose the drinks, the company and the fun—and it can be used at either location.

The Cost: Any amount up to $500

How to Order: Purchase online at barmalarkey.ca or theargyle.ca, or pick one up at the bar.

Gift Ideas for the adventurer

Loretta Meyer Portraits



The Gift Idea: Give the gift of a portrait! Treat yourself or someone special to an empowering photo session in a space where everyone is welcome, celebrated and encouraged to shine.

The Cost Custom quote.

How to Order: Visit lorettameyersportraits.com for details and to get in touch.

Film.Ca Cinemas



The Gift Idea: Give them a night at the movies! A Film.Ca Cinemas gift card lets them choose the film, grab some popcorn and enjoy a night out at Oakville's independent cinema.

The Cost: $10 minimum activation; choose any denomination above that.

How to Order: Buy online at film.ca or at the cinema snack bar.

Ripleay's Aqaurium of Canada



The Gift Idea: Give them an underwater adventure! A Ripley's Aquarium of Canada Flex Ticket lets them choose when to dive into a world of sharks, rays, jellyfish and thousands of incredible aquatic animals.

The Cost: Flex Ticket prices vary by guest type and current pricing.

How to Order: Buy at ripleys.com. Flex Tickets are valid for one visit within one year of purchase.

Gift Ideas for the wanderer

Town Inn Suites



The Gift Idea: Give them a Toronto getaway in the heart of the Church-Wellesley Village. Town Inn Suites offers spacious suites with full kitchens, living areas and skyline views—perfect for a cozy weekend or city adventure.

The Cost: Gift certificates available; accommodation rates vary.

How to Order: Visit towninn.com.

Frontenac Club



The Gift Idea: Give them a reason to escape to Kingston. A Frontenac Club membership unlocks exclusive perks at the boutique hotel, including year-round discounts, first access to special events and members-only offers.

The Cost: Membership is free.

How to Order: Join at frontenacclub.com.

Victoria's Mansion

VICTORIA'S MANSION
GUEST HOUSE

The Gift Idea: Give someone a charming downtown Toronto escape. Tucked away near Bloor-Yonge, Victoria's Mansion combines cozy rooms and modern amenities with a location made for exploring the city.

The Cost: Gift certificates available; accommodation rates vary.

How to Order: Visit victoriasmansion.com.

Gift Ideas more for the wandrer

The Yorkville Royal Sonesta Hotel



The Gift Idea: Give them a little Yorkville luxury. A gift certificate from The Yorkville Royal Sonesta Hotel Toronto can be used toward a hotel stay or dining at Signatures Restaurant or Proof Bar & Patio—letting them choose their own perfect escape.

The Cost: Choose your gift certificate amount.

How to Order: Email torontoyorkville@sonesta.com.

Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel



The Gift Idea: Give them a downtown Toronto escape. A gift card can be used toward a stay at Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, putting them in the heart of the city with shopping, entertainment and Nathan Phillips Square just steps away.

The Cost: Gift cards available from $25.

How to Order: Purchase a Marriott GiftCard or eGiftCard at gifts.marriott.com.

Craigleith Manor Boutique Bed & Breakfast



The Gift Idea: Give them a relaxing escape! A Craigleith Manor gift certificate is an invitation to unwind and enjoy a boutique bed-and-breakfast getaway in beautiful Collingwood

The Cost: Gift certificates from $100.

How to Order: Visit craigleithmanor.com or call 705-293-1170.



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Around the WORLD in 31 Days



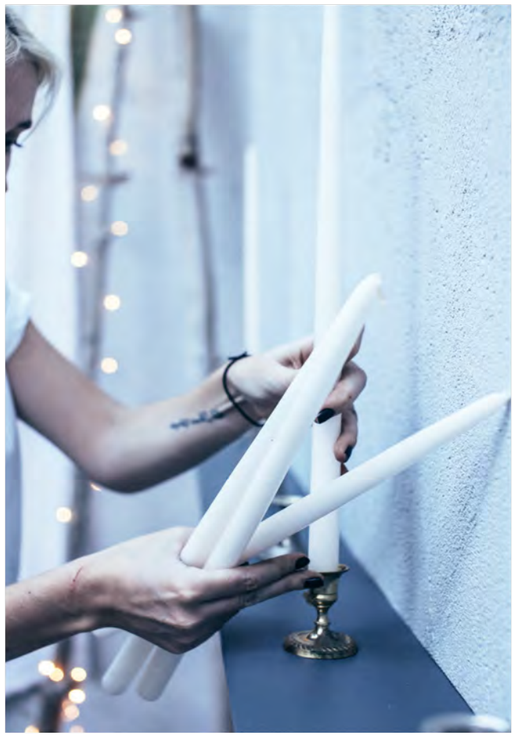
Jules Verne sent Phileas Fogg Around the World in Eighty Days. We have considerably less time.

December gives us just 31.

Fortunately, you don't need a steamship, a hot-air balloon or a suspiciously precise travel itinerary to discover just how differently people celebrate this time of year. Around the world, December and the days surrounding it are filled with traditions shaped by religion, culture, family, history and, occasionally, some wonderfully unexpected ideas.

Some involve candles. Some involve food. Some involve gifts. And at least one involves eating twelve grapes very, very quickly.

So grab your imaginary passport. We're going around the world for the holidays.



SWEDEN: A Little Light the Darkness

On December 13, Sweden celebrates Saint Lucia Day, a tradition that brings light into one of the darkest times of the Scandinavian winter.

Processions are traditionally led by someone dressed as Lucia, wearing white with a red sash and a crown of candles—or, these days, often considerably safer electric ones. Children and adults sing traditional songs while saffron buns known as lussekatter and ginger biscuits are served alongside coffee or warm drinks.

The celebration has religious roots, but over generations it has also become a broader cultural tradition associated with light, warmth and community. And in the middle of a Swedish December, when daylight can be in very short supply, a festival devoted to bringing a little more light into the world feels rather appropriate.



FINLAND: First, We Sauna

While many of us spend Christmas Eve frantically wrapping the gift we were absolutely certain we wrapped three days ago, plenty of Finnish families are doing something rather more relaxing.

They're going to the sauna.

The Christmas sauna is a long-standing Finnish tradition. For many families, it is part of the preparation for Christmas Eve—a chance to slow down, warm up and cleanse before the evening's celebrations begin.

Historically, the sauna held an important place in Finnish life far beyond relaxation, and the Christmas sauna developed its own traditions of peace, quiet and respect.

Afterwards come the celebrations, food and, depending on the household, perhaps a glass of glögi, the Finnish version of mulled wine.

Honestly, a warm sauna, mulled wine and dinner sounds like a rather civilized way to handle December. Add the right company and suddenly Finland is looking very festive indeed.

HANUKKAH: Eight Nights of Light

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight nights and commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the story of a small amount of oil that, according to tradition, burned for eight days.





At the centre of the celebration is the lighting of the hanukkiah, a nine-branched menorah. One candle is added each night, using the shamash, or helper candle, to light the others.

Food also plays an important role, particularly dishes cooked in oil. Latkes—crispy potato pancakes—and sufganiyot, jelly-filled doughnuts, are among the favourites.

Children may play dreidel, families gather, songs are sung and gifts or gelt may be exchanged.

Hanukkah does not always fall during Christmas—it follows the Hebrew calendar—but when it arrives during the broader December holiday season, those glowing candles add another beautiful celebration of light to the month.

JAPAN: Christmas, with a Side of Fried Chicken

Christmas is not a traditional religious holiday for most people in Japan, but that hasn't stopped the country from developing some very distinctive Christmas traditions of its own.

And one of the most famous comes in a bucket.

Since a wildly successful Kentucky Fried Chicken advertising campaign in the 1970s, eating fried chicken at Christmas has become enormously popular in Japan. Families often order their Christmas meals well in advance, and KFC locations can become exceptionally busy around December 24 and 25.

Christmas in Japan also tends to be more secular and romantic than family-centred. Christmas Eve is often associated with couples, date nights and elaborate illuminations that transform shopping districts and public spaces into spectacular displays of light.

There is also Christmas cake—typically a light sponge cake decorated with whipped cream and strawberries.

Fried chicken, cake, beautiful lights and a romantic evening? We're listening.

KWANZAA: Seven Days, Seven Principles

Beginning December 26 and continuing through January 1, Kwanzaa is a cultural celebration honouring African heritage, family, community and culture.

Created in the United States in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, Kwanzaa is centred around seven principles known collectively as the Nguzo Saba: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Each day focuses on one principle. Families may light candles in a kinara, display symbolic objects, share music, storytelling, art and food, and gather for a feast known as Karamu, traditionally held on December 31.

Kwanzaa was created as a cultural rather than religious holiday, which means people may celebrate it alongside Christmas or other religious traditions.

At its heart is something that feels especially fitting at the end of a year: taking time to think about who we are, what we value and how we strengthen the communities around us.

SPAIN: Twelve Grapes. Twelve Seconds. Good Luck.

If your New Year's Eve traditions involve champagne, counting backwards and trying to remember the words to Auld Lang Syne, Spain would like to add a little pressure.

At midnight, people traditionally eat twelve grapes—one with each stroke of the clock.

Each grape represents one month of the coming year, and successfully eating all twelve is supposed to bring good luck.

The tradition, known as las doce uvas de la suerte—the twelve grapes of luck—dates back more than a century and has become one of Spain's best-known New Year's customs.

It sounds simple until you consider the practical reality of chewing twelve grapes while a clock is striking twelve times. We suggest selecting smaller grapes. Luck is important. So is breathing.

ITALY: Move over, Santa. La Befana Is Coming.

Italian children have another visitor to look forward to after Santa has packed up the sleigh.

On the night of January 5, the eve of Epiphany, tradition says an elderly woman known as La Befana travels through the night delivering treats to children.

According to folklore, the Three Wise Men stopped at her home while travelling to find the baby Jesus and invited her to join them. She declined, later changed her mind and set off to find them. Unable to locate the child, she began leaving gifts for children along the way. Today, children may hang stockings for La Befana, who leaves sweets for those who have behaved well and traditionally coal—or nowadays often black candy—for those who haven't.

She is frequently depicted flying on a broomstick, wearing a shawl and looking considerably less polished than Santa.





Frankly, after an entire holiday season of perfection, we appreciate a woman who shows up on a broom and gets the job done.

And Everywhere Else...

Of course, no collection of holiday traditions could ever capture the enormous number of ways people celebrate around the world—or even within the same city.

Traditions travel with us. They change when families move, when cultures meet and when generations decide which customs they want to keep.

Sometimes we follow traditions exactly as our parents or grandparents did. Sometimes we adapt them—or invent entirely new ones—because the lives and families we create don't always look quite like the ones that came before us.

A recipe gets passed down. A song gets played every year. A particular ornament always goes on the tree. Friends gather on the same night. Someone cooks the dish everybody expects. Someone else introduces something completely new that somehow becomes tradition almost immediately.

We gather with family, friends and chosen family. And year after year, in whatever way feels like ours, we do it all again.

Because perhaps that is what traditions really are: little ways of saying, this matters to us.

Whether yours has travelled across generations, crossed an ocean, started with your family, your chosen family or is a tradition entirely of your own making, there is always room for one more way to celebrate.

After all, December gives us 31 days. We might as well make them interesting.

Authored by: theBUZZ editorial team

Photo credits: Yaroslav Shuraev, Huum, RDNE, Rachel Claire, Ana Laky, Szymon Shields, Lisa Fotios

OUR TRADITIONS

While putting together Around the World in 31 Days, we wanted to hear about the traditions that live a little closer to home. So we went to our community on Facebook and asked: "Is there a holiday tradition you grew up with that you still carry on today—or one you've changed and made your own?"

We heard from a number of people (and one team member) about traditions brought across oceans, passed from parents to children, adapted with partners and, naturally, several involving food and wine. Here are some of the traditions you shared with us.

Oliver James - Ireland → Toronto

"Christmas in Ireland for me meant my grandparents' house. Their tree was enormous, and we'd lie underneath it on our backs, looking up through the branches at the lights. My gran's trifle was so heavy on the rum that my uncle wouldn't drive after it. At my mom's, putting up the tree was timed to the Smash Hits Poll Winners Party on TV. My sister was in charge of decorations. I was in charge of pouring the wine and wearing the garland as a feather boa. I still put the tree up to music. These days, in Toronto, my partner sings along and does the decorating, because he's the professional. I'm still on wine and boa duty."

Nata Lino - Southern Italy → Canada

"I grew up in Southern Italy, where I was taught how to make tomato sauce, wine and many other things that I still make today. Every year, I make enough tomato sauce to last the whole year. I also celebrate Epiphany in January, which is a holiday for me, and I've continued that tradition in Canada. More recently, I've started celebrating Thanksgiving in Canada, even though it wasn't a holiday I grew up celebrating."

Nicolle Sirisko

"I always wrap my gifts late on Christmas Eve while listening to the A Very Special Christmas album from the '90s, with a glass of wine—or several. My parents did the same thing when we were kids, after we went to bed, and I've kept up the tradition. Mostly because I'm never organized enough to wrap things ahead of time."

Cassandra J. Henry

"Our annual tradition is watching A Christmas Story, when my parents point out the 0.25 seconds of screen time where my sister was playing in the background of the schoolyard, since it was filmed at her school in St. Catharines."

David Vogelhut - INspired Media Team

For David, holiday traditions inevitably seem to find their way back to food. He still loves baking cookies—traditionally German and definitely ginger-flavoured—and he's inherited another tradition from his partner: the need to make a trifle whenever they entertain.

In David's words, that's his "happy place."

Traditions travel with us

Different countries. Different families. Different generations. Some traditions survive almost exactly as we remember them; others change as our lives do. And sometimes a new partner, a new home—or simply a really good trifle—adds another one to the list. Thank you to everyone who shared a little piece of their holidays with us.

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There's SCIENCE Behind That?





It started, as many things around BUZZworthy headquarters do, with somebody asking a question.

Why does one particular holiday song suddenly transport us back twenty years? Why can the smell of something baking make us think of someone we haven't thought about in ages? Why do we keep doing the same slightly ridiculous things every December simply because we've always done them? We could have shrugged and said, "because it's the holidays."

Instead, being the naturally curious. and rather heklpful people that we are, we went looking for answers.

And apparently, there's science behind a surprising amount of it. So we did the digging. You're welcome.

Yes, There's Actually Science Behind This

Scientists have actually studied many of the behaviours, sensations and traditions we associate with the holidays, and some of their discoveries are surprisingly fascinating. From what happens when a familiar smell reaches your brain to why those quirky traditions may genuinely make celebrations more enjoyable, science has been quietly poking around in our holiday business.

And it turns out there are actual reasons for some of this stuff.

The findings featured in this article are drawn from published scientific research, including peer-reviewed studies in psychology, memory, consumer behaviour and social connection, along with international wellbeing research. We've translated the science into plain language—and added a little BUZZworthy sparkle—but the research behind it is very real.

Why Can One Smell Take You Straight Back to Childhood?

Cinnamon. Pine. Gingerbread. A particular perfume. Something roasting in the kitchen. Suddenly, you're eight years old again.

That feeling isn't just holiday sentimentality. Researchers studying autobiographical memory have found something unusual about smell: memories triggered by odours tend to reach further back into childhood than memories prompted by words or images.

Research reviews have found that odour-evoked autobiographical memories are disproportionately drawn from the first decade of life, while memories prompted by verbal and visual information tend to cluster more heavily in adolescence and early adulthood. Smell-triggered memories have also frequently been associated with a particularly strong sensation of being transported back in time.

There is still scientific debate over whether memories associated with smells are inherently more emotional, with newer research complicating that part of the story. But the ability of an actual odour to act as a powerful memory cue is well established.

So if the smell coming from somebody's kitchen suddenly transports you back to holidays at Grandma's house, your nose may have just opened a very old filing cabinet. No time machine required.

Why Can a Holiday Song Hit You so Hard?

Apparently our ears have their own filing cabinet.

Researchers have a name for these experiences: music-evoked autobiographical memories. Familiar music can become intertwined with memories of particular people, places and periods of our lives, and brain-imaging research has linked music-evoked









autobiographical memories with activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, a region involved in autobiographical information and self-referential processing.

Which may help explain why holiday music can be particularly potent. We hear many of the same songs repeatedly, year after year, while decorating, eating, shopping, celebrating and spending time with people who matter to us. Eventually, a song isn't merely a song anymore. It's attached to a life.

So when that familiar holiday favourite starts playing and you suddenly remember a room, a person or a celebration from years ago, your brain has apparently decided the DJ should also be an archivist. And yes, Mariah has entered the chat again.

Why Do We Keep Doing That Weird Thing Every Year?

You know the tradition. Maybe everybody wears matching pyjamas. Maybe someone reads the same story. Perhaps there's a particular dish that absolutely must be served, an ornament that gets ceremoniously hung or a game that becomes far too competitive after dinner.

Whatever yours is, researchers have found evidence that family rituals really can add something to a holiday.

In three studies involving 1,098 participants, researchers found that family rituals were associated with greater holiday enjoyment because they increased feelings of closeness and involvement. Simply spending the holiday with family was associated with greater enjoyment—but performing a ritual together added something beyond simply being together. The researchers also found a similar pattern around the secular celebration of New Year's Eve.

In other words, that slightly silly thing your family refuses to stop doing may actually be helping create the very feeling that makes the holiday special.

So perhaps don't roll your eyes quite so hard this year Or do. Eye-rolling may already be part of the tradition.

Why Does Everybody End up Around the Table?

Maybe the holiday meal isn't only about what's on the plate.

The 2025 World Happiness Report examined meal sharing using Gallup data covering 142 countries and territories and found that people who shared more meals with others reported greater life satisfaction and positive emotions, and fewer negative emotions. The relationship appeared across ages, genders, countries, cultures and regions.

That's an association, not proof that sitting down for dinner automatically makes us happier—the researchers themselves caution that causation remains unresolved. But the relationship is striking.

Sharing meals was such a strong indicator of subjective wellbeing that the researchers compared its predictive strength with familiar factors such as income and unemployment. People who shared more meals were also less likely to report loneliness and more likely to report having social support.

So perhaps there's something happening around that holiday table besides gravy. Although, to be clear, we remain strongly in favour of gravy.

Why Is Buying the Perfect Gift so Ridiculously Difficult?

Because apparently the giver and the receiver aren't always judging the same gift in the same way.

A 2024 meta-analysis brought together 153 effects from 114 studies across 29 papers and confirmed a persistent mismatch researchers call the "gift gap"—differences between how gift givers and recipients evaluate gift exchanges.





And sentimental gifts provide a particularly interesting example.

Research has found that givers can shy away from sentimental presents because they worry they're risky. Recipients, meanwhile, can value precisely the personal meaning and memories attached to them.

Which means we may occasionally be making holiday shopping harder than necessary.

The perfect present doesn't always have to be the newest, biggest or most impressive thing in the store. Sometimes the thing that says I know you, I remember this, and this means something to us may land harder than we expect. Science: potentially saving you a trip back to the mall.

Should We Be Giving Experiences Instead?

Sometimes, yes—and there's research behind this one too.

Experiments examining real-life gift exchanges found that experiential gifts strengthened relationships more than material gifts in the situations studied. Interestingly, that happened whether or not the giver actually shared the experience with the recipient. Researchers concluded that the stronger emotional response generated while experiencing the gift helped account for the relationship effect.

Concert tickets. A great dinner. A class. A show. An adventure. Something you've always wanted to do together—or even something wonderful for the other person to experience without you.

None of this means you should stop putting fabulous things in boxes. We would never suggest anything so drastic. It simply means that sometimes the memory created by a gift can become part of the gift itself.

Does Giving Actually Make Us Feel Good?

Here's an interesting twist: not only can doing something kind make us feel good, how we think about the kindness may matter too.

Across six field and laboratory experiments, researchers compared broad prosocial goals such as making someone happy with more concrete goals such as making someone smile. Participants pursuing the specific, achievable acts subsequently reported greater personal happiness. The researchers linked this partly to the smaller gap between what people expected their act to accomplish and what actually happened.

That's rather lovely when you think about it. You don't have to fix everything.

Make one person smile. Deliver one meal. Help one neighbour. Give one thoughtful gift. Do one thing you can actually see making a difference.

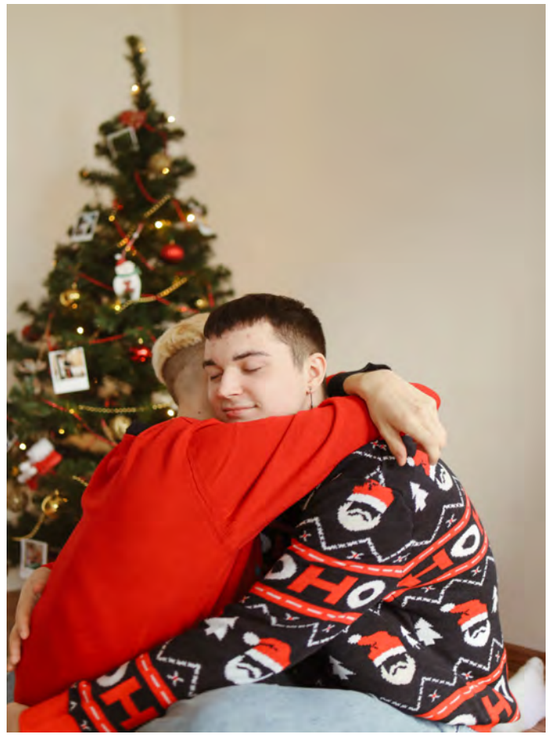
Apparently, aiming a little smaller can sometimes leave us feeling a little better.

And What's with All the Lights?

Now for perhaps our favourite weird piece of holiday research.

Researchers once investigated what exterior Christmas decorations communicate about the people living inside a home. Participants looked at photographs of houses and formed impressions of the residents without meeting





them. And yes—the decorations mattered.

People used Christmas decorations as a cue that residents were friendlier and more socially cohesive. The researchers suggested that decorating the outside of a home could communicate accessibility and attachment to the neighbourhood.

To be clear, the study dates back to 1989 and concerned Christmas decorations specifically, so we probably shouldn't build an entire theory of modern human behaviour around somebody's inflatable reindeer.

But what a delightful idea. Maybe all those lights, wreaths, ornaments and increasingly ambitious front-yard displays aren't simply saying look at my house. Perhaps they're also saying we're here, we're celebrating, come share a little of it with us. And after looking at all this research, maybe that's the most interesting thing science tells us about the holidays.

The smells connect us to our past. The songs connect us to our memories. Rituals connect us to the people we celebrate with. Meals bring us together. Gifts can strengthen relationships. Giving connects us to others. And even the decorations outside our homes may send little social signals to the people around us.

We spend so much of the holiday season creating connection without necessarily realizing that's what we're doing.

So go ahead. Bake the thing that makes the whole house smell like the holidays. Play that song again. Do the silly family tradition. Linger around the table. Give something meaningful. Help somebody smile. And if you feel like adding another string of lights outside…

Apparently, you can tell everyone you're doing it for science.

Authored by: theBUZZ editorial team

Photo credits: Helena Jankovičová Kováčová, Tima Miroshnichenko, RDNE, cottonbro, Pavel Danilyuk, Damir K, Katia Wolf

Gift Ideas for the indulger

Sparta Candles



The Gift Idea: Give them something that smells fabulous and lasts. Sparta Candles has been hand-pouring candles for over 30 years and pioneered a refill system that lets you reuse the jar. Try Spartaberry, their signature blend of more than 40 essential oils.

The Cost: Various sizes from $11.99 to $27.99.

How to Order: Shop at spartacandles.com. Free shipping on Ontario mail orders over $45.

You're Welcome Tattoos



The Gift Idea: Give them a reason to escape to Kingston. A Frontenac Club membership unlocks exclusive perks at the boutique hotel, including year-round discounts, first access to special events and members-only offers.

The Cost: Membership is free.

How to Order: Join at frontenacclub.com.

Mystic Brews



The Gift Idea: Give them a little insight into the year ahead. A Tarot or Medium Reading with Deborah Murray offers a personal session designed to bring clarity, guidance and connection—and makes a wonderfully unexpected gift.

The Cost: $100 per hour.

How to Order: Contact Deborah Murray at 1-613-854-0156.

Gift Ideas for the creative

Sandee Lovas



The Gift Idea: Give the gift of a portrait! Treat yourself or someone special to an empowering photo session in a space where everyone is welcome, celebrated and encouraged to shine.

The Cost Custom quote.

How to Order: Visit lorettameyersportraits.com for details and to get in touch.

Artisan MRKT



The Gift Idea: Give them the fun of choosing something for themselves. An Artisan MRKT gift card opens the door to a curated collection of unique finds from Canadian small businesses—perfect when you know they'll love something, but aren't quite sure what.

The Cost: Available in $25, $30, $50, $100 and $200 denominations.

How to Order: Join at frontenacclub.com.

Kimberfire



The Gift Idea: Give them the gift of something truly one of a kind. Kimberfire specializes in unique, custom-made jewellery handcrafted in Toronto—from engagement rings and diamonds to pieces created especially for the person you love.

The Cost: Custom pricing.

How to Order: Visit kimberfire.com to book an appointment.

Gift Ideas *for the charitable*

Florens Foundation



The Gift Idea: Give a gift that brings people, the planet, and creativity together. Bullying prevention and mental health programming is central to Florens' work. Every contribution helps us continue showing people that they deserve to feel seen, heard, understood, and empowered.

The Cost: Give what you can.

How to Order: Donate at florens.foundation.

Metropolitan Community Church

The Gift Idea: Give a gift that celebrates someone while supporting the community. Make a donation to MCC Toronto in honour of someone special and help support its human-rights work, advocacy and community programs.

The Cost: Give what you can.

How to Order: Make a one-time gift at mcctoronto.com/donate.

Durham Alliance Outreach

The Gift Idea: Give something that goes directly back into the community. Support Durham Alliance Outreach with a donation, or help stock DAO Market with food, household essentials, personal-care products and other much-needed items for local 2SLGBTQIA+ community members.

The Cost: Give what you can.

How to Order: durhamallianceoutreach.org/donate

Gift Ideas *for everyone else*

Tasco Appliance



The Gift Idea: Give their kitchen a serious upgrade. Miele's full-surface induction cooking eliminates predefined cooking zones, giving them the freedom to place and move cookware wherever they want across the cooking surface.

The Cost: Contact Tasco Appliance for current pricing.

How to Order: Visit tascoappliance.ca.

Global Hearing Aid Clinic



The Gift Idea: Give the gift of better hearing. A personalized hearing evaluation from Global Hearing Aid Clinic can help someone better understand their hearing and take the first step toward hearing more of life's precious moments.

The Cost: $100.

How to Order: Visit globalhearing.ca.

The Mindful Spine



The Gift Idea: Give someone a little relief. The Mindful Spine Wellness Studio offers chiropractic care and wellness treatments designed to help ease discomfort, improve movement and get them feeling better. e for exploring the city.

The Cost: 25% off an initial assessment + treatment when mentioning Pink Pages Directory.

How to Order: Call 437-453-9917 or visit themindfulspine.ca.



Eat, Drink & Be Mary

Festive cocktails, merry mocktails and delicious seasonal treats to pour, nibble and share.

We've been scrolling. And scrolling. And scrolling.

Somewhere between the dancing dogs, holiday decorating hacks and people doing things with wrapping paper we still don't entirely understand, we started saving recipes.

Cocktails, mocktails, sweet things, savoury things and a few creations that made us stop and think, Okay, we need to try that.

So consider this less of a BUZZworthy test kitchen and more of a holiday recipe rabbit hole. We went looking for delicious ideas making the rounds online, picked a few we'd genuinely like to try ourselves and brought them together here.

We haven't made all of them yet—so you're trying them with us.

Mary, what could possibly go wrong?



THE CRANBERRY ORANGE MERRY-TINI

Cranberry and orange are everywhere during the holidays, and for good reason. They're tart, bright, festive and conveniently dressed for the occasion.

You'll need

2 oz vodka

1 oz cranberry juice

½ oz orange liqueur

½ oz fresh lime juice

A splash of fresh orange juice

Fresh cranberries and an orange twist

Make it

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add the vodka, cranberry juice, orange liqueur, lime and orange juice. Shake until properly chilled, strain into a martini or coupe glass and finish with cranberries and an orange twist.

Want a little extra holiday drama? Sugar the rim first.

Because apparently the glass needed an outfit too.



ESPRESSO YOURSELF

The espresso martini refuses to leave the party, so frankly we've stopped trying to make it. And during the holidays, it practically begs for a little seasonal makeover.

You'll need

1½ oz vodka

1 oz freshly brewed espresso, cooled slightly

¾ oz coffee liqueur

½ oz vanilla or simple syrup

A tiny pinch of cinnamon

Coffee beans for garnish

Make it

Add everything except the garnish to a cocktail shaker filled with ice and shake it harder than you think you need to—the vigorous shake helps create that beautiful foamy top. Strain into a chilled coupe or martini glass, dust very lightly with cinnamon and add three coffee beans. Coffee and cocktails together.

Finally, multitasking we can support.

Mary Without the Booze



PEAR, ROSEMARY & SPARKLE

Pear and rosemary have been showing up together in seasonal zero-proof drinks, and we understand the attraction. It's crisp, herbal and grown-up without trying too hard.

You'll need

2 oz pear nectar
¾ oz fresh lemon juice
½ oz simple syrup
1 small sprig fresh rosemary
Sparkling water
Pear slice and rosemary for garnish

Make it

Gently clap the rosemary between your hands to release its aroma, then add it to a shaker with the pear nectar, lemon juice, simple syrup and ice.

Shake, strain into an ice-filled wine glass and top generously with sparkling water. Garnish with a thin pear slice and fresh rosemary sprig. It looks suspiciously sophisticated for something this easy. We won't tell.



POMEGRANATE GINGER FIZZ

If you're going to make a holiday mocktail, you may as well give it some attitude. Pomegranate brings the colour and tartness; ginger brings the kick.

You'll need

2 oz pomegranate juice
¾ oz fresh lime juice
½ oz honey syrup
Ginger beer'
Pomegranate seeds and fresh mint

Make it

Shake the pomegranate juice, lime and honey syrup with ice. Strain into a tall glass over fresh ice and top with ginger beer.

Scatter a few pomegranate seeds over the top and finish with mint.

It's bright, fizzy, slightly spicy and absolutely does not require vodka to justify its existence.

Although we're not your mother.

Now, Feed Mary



CRANBERRY BRIE BITES

These little things have been appearing in various forms all over the place, probably because they combine three important holiday-food qualities: they're ridiculously easy, they look impressive and they contain melted Brie.

You'll need

Frozen mini phyllo shells
Brie, cut into small cubes
Whole-berry cranberry sauce
Chopped pecans
Fresh rosemary

Make it

Place the phyllo shells on a baking sheet and tuck a cube of Brie into each one. Bake according to the phyllo-shell package directions until the pastry is crisp and the cheese has melted.

Spoon a little cranberry sauce over each, scatter with chopped pecans and finish with the tiniest bit of rosemary. Serve warm.Then act surprised when they're gone before you've managed to eat one yourself.



DIRTY MARTINI DIP

Dirty-martini-inspired dips have been making the rounds, combining creamy cheese with olives, briny goodness and all the flavours that make a dirty martini gloriously dirty. Our extremely uncomplicated version keeps the idea where we like it: easy.

You'll need

1 package cream cheese, softened
½ cup sour cream
½ cup finely chopped green olives
1–2 tbsp olive brine
1 small clove garlic, finely grated

Freshly cracked black pepper. Lemon zest. Extra olives for the top

Make it

Beat the cream cheese and sour cream together until smooth. Fold in the chopped olives, a tablespoon of olive brine and the garlic Taste before adding more brine—you want dirty martini, not Atlantic Ocean. Spoon into a serving bowl, finish with plenty of cracked pepper, a little lemon zest and a few extra olives. Serve with crackers, crostini or crisp vegetables. Martini glass optional.

Mary Has a Sweet Tooth



GINGERBREAD PRETZEL BARK

Chocolate bark is one of those holiday ideas that barely qualifies as cooking, which is precisely why we love it. And the current obsession with sweet-salty combinations gives us permission to throw pretzels into the situation.

You'll need

Chocolate of your choice
Mini pretzels, roughly broken
Crushed gingerbread cookies
Dried cranberries
Chopped pistachios
A pinch of flaky sea salt

Make it

Melt the chocolate gently and spread it over a parchment-lined baking sheet. Before it sets, scatter over the pretzels, crushed gingerbread, cranberries and pistachios. Finish with the smallest pinch of flaky salt. Chill until firm, then break into gloriously uneven pieces.

Put it on a beautiful platter and suddenly you've made dessert. Nobody needs to know how little work was involved.

NOW GO MAKE SOMETHING

Will every viral recipe become a treasured family tradition? Absolutely not. Some things belong on social media and should remain there.

But somewhere among all that scrolling are genuinely clever ideas, unexpected flavour combinations and little things that make you think, Why haven't I tried that? That's half the fun of the holidays anyway.

Try something new. Change something you don't like. Add more spice. Leave something out. Make the cocktail into a mocktail. Make the mocktail into a cocktail. Put everything on a fabulous platter and take full credit for how good it looks.

And if one of these becomes the thing everybody asks you to make again next year?

Well, congratulations, Mary... you just started a tradition.

Authored by: theBUZZ editorial team
Photo credits: Anastasia Shuraeva, theBUZZ team



BUZZworthy Horoscope

What do the stars have planned for your holidays? Probably something fabulous, mildly chaotic and entirely your own doing.

The halls are decked, the invitations are arriving and somebody has already started playing holiday music far too early. Before you RSVP, swipe right, buy another sequined outfit or tell your family exactly what you've been thinking since last December, perhaps we should consult the stars. We make absolutely no guarantees about their qualifications.

♈ ARIES | March 21 – April 19
You can't attend every party, Aries, so choose the fabulous ones—and keep an eye out for unexpected mistletoe. Holiday mantra: I do not have to RSVP yes.

♉ TAURUS | April 20 – May 20
Good food, good company and somewhere comfortable to land are all you need—although a little holiday flirtation wouldn't hurt. Holiday mantra: I'll have seconds.

♊ GEMINI | May 21 – June 20
Your calendar is chaos and your group chats are multiplying, but one festive conversation could become surprisingly interesting. Holiday mantra: I can explain.

♋ CANCER | June 21 – July 22
Make the holidays magical, Cancer, but let somebody else refill the drinks and remember you're a guest too. Holiday mantra: Sit down, darling.

♌ LEO | July 23 – August 22
Wear the outfit, make the entrance and enjoy the attention—but your best moment may happen when nobody's watching. Holiday mantra: All I want for Christmas is applause.

♍ VIRGO | August 23 – September 22
Your lists are ready and everyone else is winging it, but the night that goes off-plan may be the best one. Holiday mantra: Good enough is occasionally good enough.

♎ LIBRA | September 23 – October 22
When the invitation says festive, obviously choose queer festive—and if romance offers two options, eventually you'll have to pick one. Holiday mantra: I'll decide after one more outfit.

♏ SCORPIO | October 23 – November 21
Someone from your past may reappear looking dangerously good; admire the photo, then keep moving forward. Holiday mantra: Delete. Block. Pour.

♐ SAGITTARIUS | November 22 – December 21
Show up for dinner, hug everybody and then follow that last-minute invitation somewhere fabulous. Holiday mantra: I'll figure it out when I get there.

♑ CAPRICORN | December 22 – January 19
Put down the five-year plan, have dessert and stay another hour—the world can wait until January. Holiday mantra: Out of office means out of office.

♒ AQUARIUS | January 20 – February 18
Forget how the holidays are supposed to look and create one weird, wonderful celebration that actually looks like you. Holiday mantra: Tradition starts somewhere.

♓ PISCES | February 19 – March 20
Enjoy the mistletoe and holiday magic, Pisces, but please don't plan the wedding before dessert. Holiday mantra: It's mistletoe, not destiny.

Whatever the stars have planned, spend the holidays with people who make you laugh, eat the dessert, wear the ridiculous outfit, kiss somebody if you both want to and create traditions that actually mean something to you. And when midnight arrives, don't worry about becoming a whole new person—the one you've already become is pretty damn fabulous. See you next year.

Happy Holidays