

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

**NIKOLAUSABEND—NICHOLAS EVE
KRAMPUSNACHT—KRAMPUS NIGHT
der 5. Dezember**

Sitten und Bräuche (customs and traditions)

Don't forget to leave your boots on the doorstep!

Polish your boots

The bigger the better, apparently. December 6th is St. Nicholas' Day. Hopeful children polish their boots the night before and leave one out with the hopes that St. Nick will visit and fill them with chocolates. Before the Reformation, it was St. Nicholas' Day which was celebrated as the main day for giving presents, but Germany has since shifted its gift giving to Christmas time.

And the boots have to be polished first?

Definitely. Dirty boots are unacceptable. Children polish their boots to show they've been good. They usually place just one boot outside their door so they don't appear too greedy, though.

And children leave out boots because...?

According to the story, the girls had left their stockings and shoes in front of the fire to dry – and when Nikolaus tossed the bags of gold through an open window, this was where they landed.

Nikolaus became known as a gift-giver, and today's children still put out shoes in the hope that he will ride by on his donkey or horse and fill the shoe with sweets, fruit, toys and money.

For every child?

Nah, only the good ones. For the rest... well, it differs between families.

In some cases, St Nikolaus leaves a switch of wood for parents to spank naughty children with - while in other areas, "Nikolaus" visits homes and schools with his alter-ego Knecht Ruprecht to question kids about their behaviour.

Admit to being naughty and you're in for a few stern words - or even a pretend spanking.

Scary companion

Less of a role model is Saint Nicholas's companion Knecht Ruprecht, who embodies evil and takes a switch stick to the children who have been bad or threatens to stuff them into the sack. This negative figure was used especially in the past as a means to teach and admonish children so that they would always be good. Nowadays, the image of Saint Nicholas is not supposed to evoke fear anymore. Instead, it should bring children joy, fill them with the Christmas spirit, and inspire them to do good deeds.

Shoes at the door