

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

WEIHNACHTZEIT / CHRISTMAS SEASON

NIKOLAUSABEND—NICHOLAS EVE
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YOU'D BETTER NOT POUT—KRAMPUS IS COMING TO TOWN



Krampus on the Prowl

Sharp horns, a fur-covered costume, and a very scary face—it's not your typical Christmas with Krampus around!

Residents in many Alpine villages in Europe take Old Saint Nick's warning about being “naughty or nice” to a whole different level. Rather than a mere lump of coal, naughty children in the Alps may get a visit from a chain-rattling, club-carrying, horned monster!

In many countries throughout Europe, St. Nicholas Day is celebrated on December 6. The benevolent saint, clad in a Bishop's mitre and carrying a staff, brings sweets and small gifts to good children. Whereas the western Santa Claus is responsible for both good and bad children, St. Nicholas is often accompanied by a darker companion who deals with misbehaving youth, often with threats, warnings, or a stone in their stocking.

This character goes by many names, such as Knecht Ru-

precht in Germany, *Schmutzli* in Switzerland, *Belsnickel* or *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete) in other places. Though details vary, these companions are invariably disheveled, dirty, and not very jolly, though most definitely human.

In the Alps and parts of southern Bavaria, things take a darker turn, and St. Nicholas is joined by horned, hairy creatures known as “*Krampus*,” the ancient German word for claw, who may whip troublesome tykes with birch branches or cart them off in a sack to his demonic lair.

“When I was a kid being bad or doing something wrong my parents would tell me that come December, *Krampus* is coming and putting me in a sack,” said Tom Bierbauer, the head of “*Sparifankerl-Pass*,” (Devil Group) a *Krampus* club in Munich, Germany.

The evening before St. Nicholas Day is known as “*Krampusnacht*” (*Krampus* Night) and many villages celebrate with a “*Krampuslauf*” (*Krampus* run) where hordes of men in hideous masks and furry costumes shamble through the streets, frightening children and threatening folk with bundles of birch branches or whips made of horse tails.

In ancient times, *Krampus* were exclusively single men