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The Non-Swiss Perspective

A 10-step Christmas survival guide

Anyone who has enjoyed Christmas time in the Berner Oberland, will agree: Christmas is no less of an event over there than it is in the rest of the world! My first time, not long after I learned about wearing shoes, I was literally inducted into Swiss Christmas Tradition. My lovely wife-to-be felt it important to brief me on the social etiquettes of present unwrapping.

The exchange of gifts in most households I've had the pleasure of sharing Christmas in, usually involves one person taking on the role of "gift distributor". This person hands each gift out in turn with a short break between in order that the recipient might say, "Thanks" across the room and then rip the paper and offer the appropriate excitement at the wonderful set of new golf balls.

The paper ends up in a large plastic Farmers bag and it's dropped into the recycle bin along with all the cardboard and other debris.

The whole process takes maybe half an hour and then everyone gets busy trying out their new toys or back to the kitchen to look after the ham / turkey.

Not so in Switzerland. I think bullet points are more appropriate here: (so as to remember them easier should you find yourself in a Swiss home over Christmas.) If you take care to follow the 10 steps, you should be fine (refer to box).

A couple of other points to remember:

- ♥ The Christmas Angel delivers the presents at night on the 23rd December so that they are on display the entire day under the tree on the 24th.
- ♥ Presents are opened AFTER dinner and BEFORE (sometimes DURING) dessert.
- ♥ Nothing at all happens on the 25th other than the annual church visit which, so far as I can tell, was not obligatory for "Ausländer."



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The 10 steps

(Cut along the dotted line for safe keeping)

1. Each giver personally collects the gift from under the tree and delivers it to the receiver. The giver must take care to not get burnt by the lit candles on the tree.
2. The receiver thanks and gives three (not one, not two, but three) kisses to both cheeks in turn.
3. The receiver then comments on the amazing quality of the wrapping.
4. The receiver then politely requests from the previous receiver the surgical scissors.
5. The receiver is then obliged to make tiny incisions into the sticky tape of the wrapping paper so as to preserve the paper for generations of future use and recycling. The giver, no doubt expects that the paper forms part of the present.
6. Each fold of wrapping is to be carefully peeled back, taking care to neither tear nor unduly crease the paper.
7. The unfolding process is to be accomplished so that only the final action exposes the gift inside.
8. The Receiver then, once again, thanks the giver for the wonderful set of golf balls (no difference there apparently) and displays the gift to all present. This is the opportunity for others to make comments about the quality / appropriateness of the gift.
9. The process of un-wrapping a gift, from start to finish, should take no less than 5 minutes.
10. The entire process is expected to last at least two and a half hours, so be sure to visit the "facilities" prior.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you to find and sharpen your surgical scissors – Christmas is not far away.

Merry Christmas!

By David Latham



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