

1 Who is Sinterklaas?

The man in the mitre is impersonating Saint Nicholas, a 4th century bishop who lived in Myra, in what is now Turkey. From the 11th century onwards, news of his miracles spread around Western Europe and he became the patron saint of practically every section of society, including children.



2 The arrival of Sinterklaas (in Dutch called: de intocht)

Since 1952 the arrival of Sinterklaas has been a televised event which sees the Sint and his Pieten land in style from their steamer from Spain (although Sinterklaas has been known to arrive by train, plane and even a hot air balloon). A different place to set foot on land is judiciously chosen every year. Sinterklaas always arrives on a Saturday at least three weeks before December 5 so you have lots of time to spend money on presents.

(This year: 16th of November in Apeldoorn)

3 Draw lots ('een lootje trekken')

Once Sinterklaas is actually in the country, the fun can begin. Sinterklaasavond, the night of December 5th, is usually celebrated with family and/or friends. Lots bearing the names of the participants are drawn some time beforehand and an agreement is made about how much will be spent on the presents. According to a recent consumer **poll** the Dutch spend between €10 and €50 euros on a present while expenses for the whole evening don't exceed an average of €100.

In our school the children from groep 5 will do this in the week of: November 18th.

4 Shoes ('je schoen zetten')

In the days leading up to the 5th of December, children put their shoes in front of the fire (or the radiator) in the hope that Sinterklaas will fill it with a small present or a chocolate goody. Some children think they can get around the Sint by leaving a carrot for the bishop's horse, accompanied by a wish list.

In our school the children will do this on November 25th. The children will need to bring an 'extra' shoe.

5 Songs

Sinterklaasliedjes, or Sinterklaas songs, are sung when the children put their shoe in front of the fireplace and at the beginning of the 5th of December festivities. Most of the songs date from the 19th and early 20th century and, like the character of Zwarte Piet, some have been adapted to the changing times: in the traditional welcoming song 'Sinterklaasje, kom maar binnen met je knecht' (Sinterklaas please come in with your servant) the word 'servant' has been replaced by 'Piet'.

At some point, every Dutch child comes face-to-face with Sinterklaas, whether it be at school or their hockey club or even a home visit. Yes, there are lots of specialist agencies around who will supply you with a Sint and Piet, or even a video message from the great man. Sinterklaas carries with him '*het grote boek*': a big book with the name of every man, woman and child in it which tells him if they are deserving of a present or not. If Sint visits your home, he will read out all about you from the book (slipped to him in advance by mum or dad) and hand over your gifts.

6 Poems

Sinterklaas is a feast primarily for children but make no mistake: it's also an annual grudge fest for grown-ups. People all over the Netherlands are rolling up their sleeves and licking their pencils to have a go at their siblings and friends for another great Sinterklaas tradition: the poem. The poem, which should rhyme and is read out loud by the recipient.



7 Surprises

Another Sinterklaas tradition is the so-called surprise – or extremely elaborately wrapped up and disguised present. This will plunge households into a frenzy of creativity and closed doors. Some people become extremely competitive and will go to tiresome lengths: for instance by putting your car keys in a block of ice which then has to be defrosted using a hairdryer after which a clue to the present has to be looked for in the car. Others, particularly small boys, like to bury their gift in as much gunk as possible. But most people make nice surprises, such as a cardboard computer for a gamer (but not, alas, with a computer inside, see number 4).

Wednesday afternoon (dec 4th) or Thursday morning (dec 5th) the children from groups 5 to 8 will bring their 'suprize' in de the classroom (put in a big bag / garbage bag) with an envelope on it (the poem is in the envelope).