



Festive family traditions



Writer profile

Siobhan Mason is a freelance writer and mum of teens. She first starts feeling festive when her family watch the local lantern parade together in early December. Apart from that, Boney M, Baileys or singing along to Albert Finney's *Scrooge* all get her in the Christmas spirit.

As the Christmas countdown begins, Siobhan Mason talks to local parents and business owners to find out about their festive family traditions

Whether it's going to a local carol service, making Christmas cards with your children, placing an elaborate decoration on your mantelpiece or taking toddlers to the Santa special, we all have that one festive tradition that makes the season feel truly magical for us and our family.

Some will have been passed down through a few generations while others will emerge as our children grow. Technology has introduced us to a few more (who'd have thought we'd be able to use smartphones to 'track' Santa as he delivers parcels around the world!) while social media, for better or worse, has also alerted us to everyone else's.

For one person, elf on the shelf is an excuse to have lots of mischievous fun, while for others it can be just one thing too many on the to-do list after a long day. Making Christmas magical is about choosing what works for us, our values, the energy and time we have available, and our own varying preferences for all things twinkly.

To get into the festive mood, we spoke to local businesses and parents to find out what their favourite Christmas traditions are...

Plastic-free advent

Jen Gale, Bath-based author of *The Sustainable(ish) Living Guide* (Bloomsbury, £12.99)

To avoid a plastic-encased, chocolate-filled countdown, we have an 'advent lorry' with 24 little boxes about the size of a matchbox. Inside each one, I put a Christmas activity, with the idea that we try and shift the focus from stuff to experiences.

I always include things that we were going to do anyway, like 'star in the school nativity' or 'school carol concert', along with some Christmas 'jobs', such as writing Christmas cards, stirring the Christmas pudding or decorating the tree. And of course, there'll be the odd festive treats of visiting Santa Claus or going to the local pantomime.

The kids enjoy it, it helps me out and it's plastic free – win win!

www.asustainablelife.co.uk @Sustainableish



Jen gives her children an 'advent lorry' instead of an advent calendar

DIY wreaths

Tania Orgill, owner of Bath's PlayWood Forest School

At the end of November each year, I go to the woods and gather ivy to make a festive wreath for my front door. By winding the ivy round and round until it makes a firm ring, you don't need wire as you can feed the ends back into the ring.

Add some Christmassy touches: a sprig of holly, cinnamon sticks, dried oranges, cones, little berries and red ribbon. I use a little wire to attach the cinnamon, cones and berries. I always love creating them and make them for friends and family, as well as with the mothers in my parent and toddler sessions. After Christmas, I remove the wire and ribbon, and pop the wreath on the compost heap.

www.playwoodforestschool.co.uk



Tania's compostable ivy wreath have become a Christmas tradition

Christmas morning buns

Sara Hayes, a food teacher who runs cooking classes in schools and in the community

I'm normally pretty exhausted by the time I get to the end of term, but still enjoy getting mucky with my own children whenever I can. When they were young, we tried to create a gingerbread house a few times but it always turned out to be a bit of a disaster and went soggy before we got to eat it!

But, when planning a Christmas baking club activity a few years ago, I discovered 'Christmas morning buns'. Bread-making is such a therapeutic thing to do together and gives us a chance to chat. I've adapted the recipe to suit impatient children and these have now become our pre-Christmas family bake. Everyone can help, they taste divine and they make a great treat on Christmas morning when the aunts, uncles and cousins arrive.

www.livelearncook.co.uk @live_learn_cook



Sara's Christmas morning buns are a hit with all the family

Crafty Christmas

Ali McDowall, co-founder of The Positive Planner. They sell a range of planners, journals, artworks and workshops to promote positivity, self-care and gratitude

Christmas for us is all about our making sessions, whether it's homemade gifts, decoupage baubles, advent calendars or my son's costume for his Nativity play at school.

To set the scene, I always light some candles and have some mulled wine on the hob.

Last year, we made my son's Angel Gabriel wings out of paper plates, felt and feathers. We always

spend time doing this together as a family and absolutely love the ritual of it.

www.thepositiveplanners.com

@the_positive_planner



Ali and her son made these Angel Gabriel wings out of paper plates, felt and feathers.

Cinema and Champagne

Dawn Burden, owner of My Small World toy store in Bath

On Christmas Eve (also my birthday) we always shut up shop at 4pm. The team work such long hours in the run-up to Christmas, so last year we hired the director's suite at the Tivoli cinema across the road to watch *It's A Wonderful Life* and drink Champagne. I think we'll do it every year from now on. Then it's back to mine for mulled wine and a beautiful ham with friends, my children and the My Small World team who are like family.

As the children get older, Christmas is less about presents and more about people. I separated from my husband two years ago which means we are also redefining Christmas. As I don't always spend the whole day with my children anymore, breakfast has taken on new significance. I put little gifts in their bowls so they have to open them before they pour in their cereal. They're usually wind-up toys, so the table ends up in chaos!

www.mysmallworld.co.uk  [@mysmallworldtoys](https://www.instagram.com/mysmallworldtoys)



A glass or two or fizz with friends and family is a great way to celebrate Christmas

All lit up

Angharad Pauli, Bristol expert and family travel blogger

Christmas to me, means adorning as many things as possible in twinkly lights and I am all for embracing the glitter-bedecked season. We visit a Christmas light show in the West Country each December and it never fail to get us in the festive spirit.

So far, we've been to Enchanted Christmas at Westonbirt Arboretum, Sudeley Castle Spectacle of Light, Winter Wonderland at Wookey Hole Caves and Longleat Festival of Light. All have been a magical experience.

thisbristolbrood.com  [@ThisBristolBrood](https://www.instagram.com/ThisBristolBrood)



Winter Wonderland at Wookey Hole Caves

The little things

Lucy Aston, a provider of specialist children's yoga teachers to schools in the South West and co-founder of The Hive Yoga Studio in Bath.

I am not religious at all, so Christmas for us is about taking time to focus on the simple pleasures which we often take for granted. We relax, connect with nature and feel a sense of gratitude for what we have. We visit elderly relatives, including my son Freddie's Great Grandma who is 92. We also take flowers to the graves of relatives who are no longer with us.

On Christmas Eve, we walk on Dunster beach in West Somerset where I grew up, to collect pebbles and stones to decorate. We also play board games and go carol singing around the village to collect money for charity.

www.jointhehive.co.uk  [@thehiveyogabath](https://www.instagram.com/thehiveyogabath)



Lucy's son enjoys Christmas Eve on Dunster beach in West Somerset

Down the local

Hannah Lippiatt, owner of the Kip
McGrath Bath Weston Centre

We've had many years travelling up and down the country at Christmas and now that my family have moved closer, we really like being at home.

We prep our Christmas dinner in the morning and then go to The Crown pub in Saltford. There's about a dozen families that meet up there and the children find it refreshing to see friends their own age on Christmas Day. We have a drink, some brunch and mince pies, then go home to cook dinner and have family time. It's become one of our favourite things about Christmas.

tuitionbath.co.uk



Hannah and her family enjoy a trip to The Crown pub in Saltford on Christmas Day

The final puzzle piece

Kat Dawe Schmeisser, Director of The Art Cohort studio in Bath

My family have developed a tradition of doing a 2,000-piece Christmas puzzle every festive season. It's a detailed scene of a Christmas market with shoppers and carol singers. Early in December we get the box out and make base camp for the burgeoning puzzle creation, normally at one end of the dining table or on our kitchen island.

My husband and eldest daughter can put 10 or 20 pieces in place effortlessly, whereas I can sit there for an hour and place just a handful of pieces!

We talk about the puzzle, strategise on how to complete it before Christmas and, when friends visit, they add a piece or two as well. It's pretty addictive and we all feel the glow of achievement when it's complete.

www.theartcohort.co.uk  [@the_art_cohort](https://www.instagram.com/the_art_cohort)



Christmas jigsaw can be a fun and challenging advent activity for the whole family

Charity shoebox

Julia Davey, runs a homeware and gift shop in Bath

I make up and decorate a shoebox of goodies for the Bath Cats and Dogs home with my toddlers.

It is something I have done since university, and now my children really enjoy picking out food, treats and a toy from the selection at the pet shop. They love thinking of the animals as they have a much-loved furry sibling – a whippet-cross called Maggie. juliadavey.com



Donating a shoe box of gifts to a cause is a tradition for many. Julia and her family like to donate to the Bath Cats and Dogs Home

Breaking chains

Rebecca Grainzevelles, parent coach at The Parent Collaborative in Bath.

As a way of helping my children understand and manage the lead up to Christmas, I've always got them to interlink 24 paper chains together just before the end of November. They then attach the chain to a poem about Christmas Eve, a family photo or a festive picture that they have made.

Every day from 1st December through to the 24th they remove one paper link, which allows them to talk about time and counting. I also try (but don't always succeed) to do something with them when they remove a chain, such as read a story or talk about the different ways that Christmas is celebrated around the world. On the final day, as the last chain is cut, we read a story about Christmas Eve.

www.theparentcollaborative.co.uk

[@theparentcollaborative](https://www.instagram.com/theparentcollaborative)



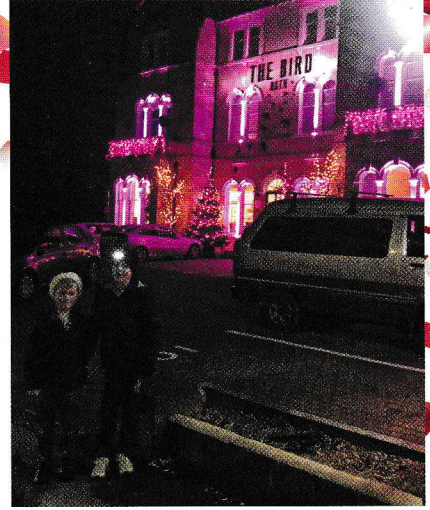
Making a paper chain as a countdown to Christmas

The early birds

Susy Douch, Events editor of the Bath & Wiltshire Parent magazine

On Christmas Eve, we love to track Santa (AKA the International Space Station – ssssh, don't tell the children!) online and then in the sky. We read *The Night Before Christmas* every Christmas Eve and give the children a Christmas book gift instead of a Christmas Eve box in the hope that they find some calm among all the busy-ness.

My boys are early risers. On Christmas morning last year, they woke before 6am, so I got them to put their coats over their pyjamas and took them and the dog out for a walk.



Susy and her family on a quiet and very early Christmas Day walk

We were still back by 7.30am ready to move onto stockings, breakfast and church. It was beautifully quiet and a peaceful start to the day. Maybe it will become a new tradition too.

New traditions

Liz Lowe, a freelance journalist based in Somerset and contributor to The Bath & Wiltshire Parent magazine

Our children are so young that we're still introducing traditions, but we have started to go ice skating every Christmas Eve in Bath, which we love. We see Father Christmas each year too – this year, we'll go to The American Museum and Gardens. I also take my daughter out for a special day and we choose what to do together. Last year, we went to Winter Wonderland in London and are hoping to do the same this year.



Liz and her children love ice skating in Bath every Christmas Eve

Reuse, reduce, recycle

Emma Ross, London-based low waste instagrammer

I like to make low waste festive gifts in the run up to Christmas.

I save up my used ground coffee from my cafetière to make up a small batch of some delicious coffee scrub. I'm not much of a DIYer but this is the simplest and quickest gift to make.

All I need is five heaped tablespoons of used ground coffee, a jug of olive oil, a jar and some sort of festive string or tag. I combine the ingredients, label and have a lovely gift for someone that will leave their skin feeling supersoft.

www.mamalina.co [@MamalinaUK](https://www.instagram.com/MamalinaUK)



Emma makes low waste DIY Christmas presents for her friends