

# Arbor House Norman

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## **A Fresh Take on Peppermint**

Peppermint bark. Peppermint lattes. Peppermint candy canes. There is no doubt about it—peppermint is the undisputed flavor of the winter season. Mint is full of the chemical menthol, which, when tasted, activates the same nerve sensors that allow us to feel cold. We love the refreshing, cooling sensation of mint in our mouths and are reminded of winter each time we take a taste. But there is more to the story of peppermint's hold on the winter season than its chemical composition.

Mint-flavored hard candies have been made for hundreds of years. Before the invention of air-conditioning, hard candy could be made only during the cool, dry months of winter, for heat and humidity would spoil the candy. Mint is a reliable flavoring because it does not cook off during the manufacturing process. Its flavor remains incredibly strong. For this reason, mint-flavored hard candy has always been a wintertime treat.

Legend has it that the first candy canes were invented in the 17th century by a German choirmaster who bribed his choirboys with peppermint candy sticks to keep them complacent during mass. Candy in church was not exactly solemn, so the choirmaster asked the candy maker to fashion the candy sticks into shepherds' crooks, honoring Jesus.

It wasn't until 1847 that a German Swedish immigrant to America named August Imgard used the candy cane as a Christmas decoration. He spun white hard candy into its crooked shape and hung the canes along with paper ornaments from a blue spruce. It would take a few more decades and the advent of mass production techniques for candy canes to get their red stripes. Why red? Some say this color represents the blood shed by Jesus on the cross, while others attribute it to the red berries and green garland of evergreen holly that has been associated with Yule traditions. Don't wait until December 26, Candy Cane Day, to enjoy candy canes. Most people start buying them the day after Thanksgiving.

## Still Living in Infamy



U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called December 7, 1941, “a date which will live in infamy.” 81 years later, we still remember the attack on Pearl Harbor and pause to honor all who were lost.

Pearl Harbor is a U.S. naval base located near Honolulu, Hawaii. It was home to the bulk of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet, hundreds of airplanes, and thousands of soldiers. American intelligence officials never expected Japanese forces to start a war with the United States with an attack on Hawaii, 4,000 miles away. For this reason, Pearl Harbor was left largely undefended on December 7, 1941. As a target, Pearl Harbor was too good of an opportunity for the Japanese to ignore.

In an audacious sneak attack, without any declaration of war, Japanese forces began their assault on Pearl Harbor at around 8 a.m. At 8:10, a 1,800-pound bomb fell through the deck of the battleship USS *Arizona* and struck an ammunition store, resulting in a massive explosion and killing thousands. After two hours of fighting, 20 American ships (including every battleship in Pearl Harbor) were crippled; 300 airplanes were destroyed; 2,403 sailors, soldiers, and civilians were killed; and a thousand more were wounded.

Luckily—amazingly—the Pacific Fleet was left intact. Despite losing its powerful battleships, the Fleet’s aircraft carriers had been off base during the attack and were safe. Pearl Harbor’s vital infrastructure, including repair shops, oil storage depots, shipyards, and submarine docks, had been largely untouched. The U.S. Navy would be able to rebuild itself for a sustained war effort.

The day following the attack, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. And though history remembers America and its Allies as the brave victors of a long and bloody world war, scars of that war remain. Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day is a time to reflect on all that was lost and a celebration of the freedoms that were won.

## Make It Count

Every year from December 14–January 5, the National Audubon Society conducts its Christmas Bird Count (CBC). During these few weeks, volunteer birders count and record bird species in an effort to monitor the health and status of bird populations across North America. Bird counts accumulate over the decades, offering scientists long-term perspectives on the continent’s bird populations.

Audubon’s CBC grew out of the Christmas “Side Hunts” of the late 19th century, when hunters would compete to bring in the largest pile of birds and animals. In 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman proposed a new tradition, a “Christmas Bird Census,” where people would count birds instead of hunting them. These days it’s easier than ever to join a CBC. Registration for birders begins in November, with counts starting on December 14. If you choose to participate, you could join a tradition that is over a century old.

## Plunge in Head-First



One of December’s strangest holidays falls on December 18. It’s Wear a Plunger on Your Head Day. An internet search will tell you that an ex-bounty hunter named Vern Halsey might be the only person in the world who celebrates this holiday along with his pet

Komodo dragon Felix, of course. If you’d like to keep Vern and Felix company this December 18, here’s a tip: Make sure you wear the correct type of plunger on your head. Plungers often come in two designs. Those that narrow at the bottom are specifically designed to fit into a toilet and are called flange plungers, while plungers designed for the sink and shower are flat and are known as cup plungers. If you’re keen on celebrating, a new, clean, store-bought cup plunger is the way to go. Happy Wear a Plunger on Your Head Day!

## Sweater Weather

Sweater weather is finally here, and there are plenty of holidays to prove it. The International Sweater Vestival, a day that encourages you to rock a sweater vest, falls on December 3, and Ugly Sweater Day follows on December 16. So dig deep into the moth-ball-ridden corners of your closet and sport that sweater you promised yourself you'd never wear again.

Sweater weather describes that slightly chilly time of year when the weather is perfect for a sweater but not yet cold enough to require a coat. But a sleeveless sweater vest? You can wear one of those anytime! Or does keeping the torso warm and the arms cold mean that such a garment is useless no matter the season? Utilitarian questions aside, the sweater vest has been shunned for decades as an uncool garment. They were originally donned by rowers in 1882, who wore them to promote sweating and weight loss. Sweater vests hit the mainstream in 1907 when the University of Michigan football team wore them in lieu of sleeved sweaters as the team uniform. Even Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover sported them, perhaps solidifying their status as uncool. But like so many trends, uncool is becoming cool again. And besides, the founders of the International Sweater Vestival don't care whether you wear your sweater vest in earnest or ironically.



When it comes to ugly sweaters, many will point the blame to *The Cosby Show's* Cliff Huxtable, the undisputed king of ugly '80s sweaters. But the first ugly sweater party was held at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2002, hosted by Chris Boyd and Jordan Birch. Since then, ugly sweaters worn for both Christmas and Hanukkah have become a holiday tradition all their own. High fashion has caught on, with designers selling high-end ugly sweaters for hundreds, even thousands of dollars. Sleeved or sleeveless, ironic or earnest, ugly or tasteful—no matter what style you choose, sweater weather is here.

## Go Big or Go Home

The first Saturday of December is Global Fat Bike Day, a day to get out and ride your fat tire. A fat bike (also known as a fatbike, fat tire, fat-tire bike, or snow bike) is an off-road bicycle equipped with oversized tires that are often anywhere from 3.5–5 inches wide. Why ride a bike with fat tires? Because these bikes allow riders to cycle over challenging terrains, such as sand, bogs, mud, and snow. Wider tires distribute a rider's weight over a larger surface area, providing increased traction. Fat bikes are the answer for riders interested in cycling year-round in inclement weather.

The fat bike was invented in the 1980s by Frenchman Jean Naud for cycling through the deserts of Africa. In the early 1990s, two Alaskans developed a fat bike for use on Alaska's Iditarod Trail Invitational, a winter ultramarathon with cycling, running, and skiing. Today, fat bikes are found in almost every bike shop. They are no longer confined to extreme terrain but are equally at home on city streets thanks to smooth tires with shallow treads.

## Digital Revolution

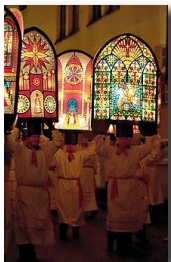


On December 9, 1968, inventor and computer engineer Douglas Engelbart gave what is now known as "The Mother of All Demos" at a computer conference in San Francisco. Engelbart's 90-minute presentation introduced a number of computing innovations that we take for granted today: windows, hypertext, graphics, word processing, video conferencing, collaborative editing of documents in real-time, and the computer mouse. Demonstrating all of these innovations on a single personal computer system in 1968 was groundbreaking. Engelbart's demo was the result of years of work at his Augmentation Research Center at Stanford University. He wanted to free computers from mere number crunching and turn them into tools for communication and information sharing.

## Chasing Tradition

At precisely 8:15 p.m. on December 5, the eve of St. Nicholas Day, all the lights in the Swiss hamlet of Küssnacht are turned off, plunging the village along Lake Lucerne into darkness. So begins the *Klausjagen*, or “Santa Chase,” one of Europe’s most impressive St. Nicholas Day traditions.

Thousands of spectators line the cobbled street that has wended its way through town since the medieval era. Suddenly, explosions as loud as gunshots pierce the darkness. Spectators shrink back from the street, fearing that they may be struck by the long sheep whips wielded by the men leading the procession.



The cracking whips passing through the pitch announce the arrival of the magnificent, glowing *iffelen*. These are massive cardboard hats, some over six feet tall, worn by robed dancers. The *iffelen* are shaped like bishops’ miters. They have been painstakingly cut and colored with tissue paper, showcasing intricate patterns that mimic beautiful stained-glass windows. The most elaborate easily take 500 hours to complete. As if this spectacle isn’t magnificent enough, the spectators hold their breath and await the arrival of Santa Claus.

Santa, or St. Nicholas, arrives with a cacophony of clanking cowbells, tooting cow horns, and a band that plays the “Santa song,” a melody of only six notes, repeated over and over again. Santa may be the star of the show, but he is not alone. *Schmutzli* walks by his side, a sinister figure robed in black who carries a broom of twigs, traditionally for whipping children who have been bad all year. This *Schmutzli*, luckily, is more benevolent, and he hands out pastries along the parade route.

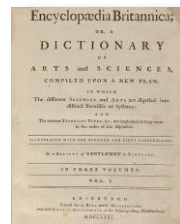
This ancient procession owes its origins to pagan winter rites where loud noises were used to scare away evil spirits. Over the centuries, Christian and pagan traditions blended to create the famous *Klausjagen* procession that attracts thousands of spectators today.

## December Birthdays

In astrology, those born from December 1–21 are Archers of Sagittarius. These Archers are philosophical seekers of knowledge who love traveling to new places to absorb new cultures. Those born from December 22–31 are Capricorn’s Goats. Patience, perseverance, and dedication help Goats climb to the highest of heights. Their drive to the top makes them excellent partners and collaborators.

Sarah Silverman (actress) – Dec. 1, 1970  
 Tyra Banks (model) – Dec. 4, 1973  
 Little Richard (musician) – Dec. 5, 1932  
 Eli Wallach (actor) – Dec. 7, 1915  
 Rita Moreno (actress) – Dec. 11, 1931  
 Dionne Warwick (singer) – Dec. 12, 1940  
 Jamie Foxx (actor) – Dec. 13, 1967  
 Pope Francis (Pope) – Dec. 17, 1936  
 Steven Spielberg (director) – Dec. 18, 1946  
 Samuel L. Jackson (actor) – Dec. 21, 1948  
 Humphrey Bogart (actor) – Dec. 25, 1899  
 Denzel Washington (actor) – Dec. 28, 1954

## Encyclopedic Memory



The *Encyclopedia Britannica* was conceived by printer Colin Macfarquhar and engraver Andrew Bell, both from Edinburgh. The two chose William Smellie as their editor, and while Smellie wrote many of the entries, he borrowed most, admitting that he “snipped out from books enough material for the printer. With pastepot and scissors I composed it!” What made the *Britannica* different was that it grouped related topics together into larger essays and organized those alphabetically, rather than separating entries by alphabetical order. Release of the first edition was announced on December 10, 1768. Critics called it the “Gospel of Satan,” while doctors complained that it undermined their authority. The prose was so vivid and the organization so easy to navigate that demand for a second edition was instantaneous, despite the first edition’s imperfect scholarship.