

《CCTV9英语新闻：希腊恢复装扮圣诞船传统》

CCTV9英语新闻：希腊恢复装扮圣诞船传统

Christmas boat tradition makes a comeback in Greece

Christmas trees, more than anything else, signify the festive holiday season across the globe. But in Greece, a small, Mediterranean country with strong bonds with the sea, a very old Christmas tradition is being revived. CCTV correspondent Filio Kontrafouris explores the revival of the Greek tradition of decorating boats instead of Christmas trees.

Thousands of blue and white lights mixed with nostalgic feelings of a centuries-old tradition. The Greek Christmas boat. It takes center stage –for the first time- in the main square of Athens...as municipalities replace the Christmas tree in several squares across Greece with a unique custom of this seafaring nation.



Christmas boat tradition makes a comeback in Greece

And it goes beyond the country's squares. Many Greeks now prefer to decorate a boat instead of a tree for Christmas. At this hostel, its Greek owners decided to hold on to tradition and also teach foreign travellers about Greece's cultural heritage.

"Usually in the past there was the seamen travelling in big ferries all around the world and they would come back to their families for Christmas so the kids would decorate these boats to welcome their dads or their people back to the islands and here we're welcoming all the travellers coming maybe on a boat or not, but welcoming them in the house." said Sofia Lizzio, Hostel General Manager.

Boats this year are even chosen to display holiday wishes. And carry a message of hope...that despite the devastating economic crisis, Greece "sails forever." Though the boat tradition is rooted in the islands and among families of seamen, it didn't take long before decorated boats spread in the rest of the country.

"The Christmas boat tradition has become popular in Greek mainland in the last decades. And that's because most Greeks now learn that the Christmas tree, as we know it, is not exactly part of their tradition." said Filio Kontrafouris, Athens.

In ancient Greece, people used to decorate greenery and tree branches around the New Year. The modern Christmas tree was imported over 150 years ago as a German custom by the first king of the modern Greek state, Otto of Bavaria.

But for centuries before that, in the Greek islands, children went door to door with small paper or wooden boats -like this one- in their hands. Neighbors would put treats inside as the children sang the Greek Christmas Carol. Today, decorative boats are widely available for sale in Christmas stores. They are in fashion and they can cost from a few to hundreds of euros, especially if they're handmade by Greek craftsmen.

"I would say, psychologically, it could be that citizens feel that something is happening. That even on this issue, we have adopted something foreign. And that's because a lot has been written about this and citizens feel this has been brought here by the Bavarians, who we don't really want much lately. So why should we get a tree when we are a seafaring nation and the boat represents us better?" said Aikaterini Polimerou-Kamilaki, Head, Hellenic Folklore Research Center.

Scholars explain that there are a lot of misconceptions about the Christmas boat tradition. Still, they say its modern embrace could mean a lot for Greece's survival as a nation.

"Tradition has influenced writers, painters, musicians. We need to hold on to that thread again. We cannot sail in a sea of globalization and endlessness. We are so few that we will get lost. If we don't hold on to something stable, which is our roots, we will get blown by the wind. For sure, we will get lost." said Aikaterini Polimerou-Kamilaki, Head, Hellenic Folklore Research Center.

And maybe, most Greeks can hope that one of those boats will be able to carry their nation to more calm waters and the safe harbor the country seeks.