



TOURISM CASE 2.:

Sinterklaas, A Dutch living heritage celebration,

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Introduction

This case describes how a tourism attraction can be developed around a living heritage like Sinterklaas. First the historical context of the Sinterklaas celebration will be explained. After this explanation, the to-day's celebration of Sinterklaas is described in the Netherlands. Also the economic input is highlighted. Chocolate letters and speculaas are traditional sweets as well as hot chocolate. It is important to gather all information to decide if the living tradition is relevant for tourism. PCT assumes Sinterklaas can be.

Sinterklaas

Sinterklaas is arriving by steamboat every year after half November on a Saturday in the Netherlands in a harbour town. After his boat has moored, Sinterklaas mounts his white horse called Amerigo. Accompanied by his so-called "zwarte Pieten", black servants, he is making a tour through the city to visit the town hall. On the balcony or on a special podium the mayor of the town receives him.



One hour later in almost all villages and towns in the Netherlands there is a parade with Sint Nicolaas on his white horse (or in a carriage). He is welcomed in these towns by the mayor on a balcony of an official building.

During the stay of Sinterklaas children all over the Netherlands put their shoe at the chimney or due to declining chimneys, the central heating or back door. In the evening the "Zwarte Pieten" put little presents in their shoes. Sinterklaas stays in the Netherlands until the celebration of his birthday at 5 December, leaving at midnight with his steamboat direction Spain. To celebrate his birthday he gives a bag with presents to every family. During the early evening the presents are unpacked. Some of these presents also contain a rhyme that has to be read during the gift unwrapping ceremony.

Objectives

After studying this unit you:

- Have more knowledge of Sinterklaas as an example of a living heritage in The Netherlands
- Are able to describe the importance of historical context of Sinterklaas
- Know how to develop an event like Sinterklaas as a tourism event

History

Saint Nicholas (Sint Nicolaas - Sinterklaas) according to modern Dutch folklore comes from Spain bearing gifts for the kids who have been sweet (see the song in the textbox right from here).

Originally though, Saint Nicolas didn't come from Spain. He was bishop of Myra, a harbour town in the current South-West of Turkey. Not much is known about his life. According to scripture he died on the 6th of December 343. After his death stories appeared about all the good he has done during his life, leading up to him being declared holy.

Saint Nicolas became patron of sailors, merchants, kids, thieves, pawnshop owners, virgins and prostitutes. His grave became a church that was specifically built for him, and turned into a pilgrimage for thousands of travellers.

In 1087 the Turks, (Seljuks) were bound to conquer Myra. Christian Western Europe didn't want to have the remains of their Saint into "heathen" hands. Sailors of the South-Italian town Bari sailed in secrecy to Myra and stole the bones of Saint Nicolas. In Bari Saint Nicolas was reburied in a specially build cathedral. His remains are there up to the present day.

The action of the sailors of Bari was not for nothing, the Turks did gain control over Myra. Both Bari as well as Myra belonged to the Byzantium Empire, that collapsed in the 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. The Normans occupied Bari in the 15th century. The Spaniards took control over Bari from 1503 up till the 18th century. That's how Saint Nicolas was "Spanish" for a few centuries.

After Saint Nicolas found his last resting place in Bari his popularity slowly spread to the Netherlands and the rest of Western Europe. Via Naples, Rome, Spain and France the worship of Saint Nicolas found his way to Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, via England it spread to Scandinavia and Iceland. Being a patron of sailors and merchants helped the spread considerably.

The festivities around Saint Nicolas were first combined with Christian ceremonies, but after the Dutch reformation (around 1566) it has been forbidden to worship saints. With the help of the state, the Protestant Christians tried to get rid of the Catholic Saint Nicolas celebration.

Dutch:

Zie ginds komt de stoomboot
uit Spanje weer aan.
Hij brengt ons Sint Nicolaas
ik zie hem al staan.
Hoe huppelt zijn paardje
het dek op en neer,
hoe waaien de wimpels
al heen en al weer.

Zijn knecht staat de lachen,
Hij roept ons reeds toe.
Wie zoet is krijgt lekkers,
Wie stout is, de roe.
Oh, lieve Sint Nicolaas,
Kom ook toch bij mij,
En rijd toch niet stilletjes,
Ons huisje voorbij.

English:

Look there is the steamboat
From far-away Spain.
It brings us Saint Nicholas,
I can see him, waving.
His horse is a-prancing
On deck up and down,
The banners are waving,
In village and town.

His servant is laughing
And tells everyone,
The good kids get candy,
The bad ones get none.
Oh, dearest Saint Nicholas,
If Pete and you would,
Just visit our house,
For we all have been good.

Yet the "sinterklaasfeest" remained, partially because of its popularity and by adapting it a little. Saint Nicolas was de-catholicised a bit. This made him acceptable for all religions as a generous bearer of gifts. Saint Nicolas turned into Sinterklaas.



Central in the Sinterklaas celebration is the reward for honest hard studying kids, and the punishment of lazy kids. In the 18th century Sinterklaas also got a pedagogical role, a place in education and the family. By writing *Sint Nicolaas and his helper (Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht)* by Jan Schenkman in 1850, the saint got his first physical shape again. Besides that, certain things were added like a steamboat and the helper. He was shown as a Moorish Page in the illustrations, these were African men that served the Spanish royalty in the 16th century. As far as known the writer had no racist motives in this matter. Another theory to explain the black peters is the fact that they go through the chimney in order to deliver gifts to the kids.

The Sinterklaas party for a long time was mainly celebrated in the (Catholic) south of the Netherlands. Due to commercial gains the request for this celebration became broader and broader, up to the point where the influence of shop owners organised the first "arrival of Sinterklaas" in Amsterdam of 1934.

After the Second World War the arrival of Sinterklaas became a national celebration. The media had an increasingly important role. The event was made public and reported on national TV, and written about in the newspapers. The Saint was received by mayors, and visited each school. Sinterklaas was omnipresent and is being taken seriously by adults. This took away any doubt young kids had about him being real.

The strength of the celebration is that it is more than just a kids party. As soon as the young kids learn the truth, (that their parents actually bought the presents rather than Sinterklaas), they are joining the other side of the “insiders”. They now know the truth, but are keeping the illusion alive for the young kids. On each primary school the youngest half are “believers” and the other half are n’t. That balance is well maintained.

The pain (and sometimes the relief) of this broken illusion is made less painful with the new possibilities: the older Sinterklaas celebrator is now capable of buying gifts, turning into what is called “Hulp-Sinterklaas” (back up Sinterklaas) and give presents to his or her family and friends.

For the family and friends poems are written and surprises made. For example a gift is packed in such a way it resembles something completely else to tease the receiver of the gift). This can be done in “anonymity”. The Sinterklaas party leads to an unexpected collective creative outlet for the entire family and groups where it is celebrated.

The appearance of Sinterklaas for an audience of believing subjects and participating insiders leads to speeches filled with ambiguities. Even those who don’t know many songs at least know a few Sinterklaas songs.

Effects of the of the Sinterklaas festivity on the Dutch economy

It was mentioned before that the popularity of Sinterklaas is widely applauded and commercialised by store owners in the Netherlands.

November 2013: “sinterklaas returned to the country, and that is a blessing for the Dutch economy”

To understand this sentence it’s important to know that the Dutch economy is highly dependant on the exports of goods via the Dutch harbours of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, so transit traffic. Because the global economy was in a decline, the big economies and the closest trading partners of the Netherlands, such as Germany France and other European countries were doing poorly, the Dutch economy got into a decline, leading to lower wages, higher unemployment and so on.

People are generally more reluctant to spent large amounts of money during periods of (economic) crisis. That’s why the Sinterklaasfeest of 2013 came at a good time to stimulate the Dutch economy. To say Sinterklaas saved the Dutch economy is a bit overdone, but the effect of spending money is surely an important factor in kick starting the economy.

In these modern days Sinterklaas gifts are also bought in web shops, these shops reported an increase of sales of around 38 million euro extra, or 42% compared to the period before Sinterklaas. In total the Dutch population spent 515 million euro during the Sinterklaas festivities of 2013

This figure represents everything related to the festivity, like the decoration of the house, pepernoten (actually kruidnoten as described later on), chocolate letters, gifts etcetera.

Culinary Sinterklaas “cuisine”

During the Sinterklaas season a lot of candy is being consumed. Pepernoten were already consumed in the 16th century as confectionary. The kids got the candy together with different gifts. These can be seen on paintings of Jan Steen (around 1663). A man points to the chimney where the gifts came from. The girl received a doll and candy and the boy on the left might have been cheeky as he is not in a happy mood.



An important part of the Sinterklaas days is putting the shoe near the chimney (nowadays the usually the back door or central heating, due to declining numbers of chimney's). The tradition dictates that Sinterklaas will visit your house (by horseback) at night, so the kids leave their shoes with some carrots or hay for the horse and write a letter with their gift wish list for the 5th of December evening.

The candy in this painting of the previous is actual called pepernoten. They look like square chunks that taste like “ontbijtkoek” a kind of gingerbread cinnamon cake.

The round cookies that are currently most eaten are actually kruidnoten, made of the same materials as speculaas, a biscuit most known in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany.



Figure 1: Pepernoten



Figure 2: Kruidnoten

In the more modern days the pepernoten were more or less replaced by the harder kruidnoten. The spices used for creating these kruidnoten (literally spice nuts) are a mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, cardamom and white pepper.

From the old times these spices originate from the Far East. Around 300 years ago sailors introduced these spices that made it possible to create these “mixed spices”. The recipe for kruidnoten has been dated back to the cookbooks of the 19th century.

Several other types of candy consumed during the sinterklaas festivities are

These kruidnoten are a quite hard and therefore well suited for a ritual related to the fertility ritual. December is traditionally the month that farmers throw seeds on their fields and hope for a fertile year. This tradition is comparable to the throwing of rice on a wedding.



Figure 3: Sponge candy



Figure 5: Sugar mice / frogs



Figure 4: Taaitaai / gingerbread

One of the strangest candies eaten during Sinterklaas are the so called sugar mouses (suikermuizen). As Sinterklaas is a jolly period of the year used for teasing each other in a similar manner to the April fools day tradition, it is expected that this candy started out as a kind of a joke. Especially woman were (and in some cases still are) afraid of mice and frogs. The idea of those creatures crawling in your shoe is fairly terrifying. This is probably why this candy was introduced to show the ladies that they don't have to be afraid for these harmless animals.

Another type of candy is the chocolate letters. There are several origin stories for these chocolate letters. One is that it originates from medieval monastery schools. Here the students learned to read and write with letters made from bread dough, as a reward the students were allowed to eat these letters.

Another "origin story" is that on each gift was a letter to indicate for whom the present was intended. There are also links to the Norse god of Odin, who supposedly discovered the magic runes. From that point of view it is plausible that consuming these letters will make you smarter.

A fun fact is that the letter M stands for Most sold, an explanation could be because M is the letter for Mother, but the most plausible reason would be pure greed. It has been shown that the letter M is the biggest letter of them all.



Figure 6: Chocolate letters

The last thing described is how oranges and chocolate coins are related.

On ancient pictures of the saint Nicholas he is often seen with three golden globes. The legend depicts that these are symbols that had been used as wedding treasures for three young girls that were born to a poor family. Because of their poverty there were doomed to remain unmarried. Nicholas decided to help them, but being too modest (or to save them the humiliation of accepting charity) to help the family in public, therefore he went to their house under the cover of darkness and threw 3 gold purses through the window.



Figure 7: Saint Nicholas seen throwing gold purses through the window of a poor family.

In the past this gold was depicted as oranges. This is also caused by the “believe” that he came from Spain. In later times these oranges were also replaced by chocolate coins in a net. So you could say that when you receive chocolate coins for Sinterklaas you actually receive a wedding treasure

Touristic options for foreigners visiting the Netherlands

Experience Sinterklaas first hand by participating in the gift giving festivities,

As an example below is a website from Curacao, an island in the Caribbean sea near Venezuela. This island is a member of the Dutch Kingdom. It shows accommodations available to experience Sinterklaas in Curacao.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Sinterklaas Curacao 2013' website. The page has a dark header with navigation links: ACCOMMODATION, OFFERS, RENTALS BY MAP, EXTRA SERVICES, GROUPS, ISLAND GUIDE, THINGS TO DO, and CONTACT US. Below the header, there's a 'Curacao events' section with text about finding accommodations and a 'Find Accommodation' form with fields for Arrival (19), Departure (22), Persons (1), and Rooms. A calendar for March 2014 is shown on the left, with the 19th highlighted. The main content area features a 'SINTERKLAAS CURACAO 2013' section with an illustration of Sinterklaas and a child, and a map of Curacao.

On this website the tourists can see what options are available. There are packages that could be suitable for families, schooltrips, teambuilding trips, international teams working in the Netherlands, etcetera.

During the stay in one of these accommodations the guests are visited by Sinterklaas and can participate in the events surrounding this festival. The kids can put their shoes near the chimney.

Examples of other touristic packages could be:

- Witness the arrival of Sinterklaas in one of the approximately 1500 cities in the Netherlands.
- Learn how to create and taste your own traditional Sinterklaas candy
- Learn how to write the best Sinterklaas poems for your loved ones
- Learn how to wrap your gifts in a funny way
- Experience what it's like to be Sinterklaas' helper by learning how to deliver gifts through the chimney (combined with modern wall climbing gear).



- Receive Sinterklaas and his helpers in the place where you stay (vacation/company).
- Come together (around the 5th of December) to share the made gifts poems and candy.

This report is combined with a presentation that is accessible via

http://prezi.com/k6jaitk-xyae/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share

Sources:

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Websites

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