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Santa Claus, or Father Christmas, still a popular addressee - Posts process over six million letters he receives every year

Source: UPU, 2007-Dec-18

The hundreds of thousands of letters sent each day to Santa Claus or Father Christmas at this time of year make the white-bearded gentleman, as well as other figures like St. Nicholas, the Three Kings or Ded Moroz, the most popular recipients of personalized letters.

A survey of Universal Postal Union (UPU) member countries showed that in 2006 Santa received more than six million letters and that some 20 postal operators employed elves to help him handle the huge volume of mail. And at a time when the personal letter is being seriously challenged by electronic communication, all the operators surveyed agreed that the number of letters to Santa continues to grow.

Written by children and filled with the most fanciful wishes, these missives, often addressed simply "To Santa, North Pole", should normally be regarded in postal jargon as "undeliverable" and stamped "addressee unknown". In many countries, however, this mail is collected, forwarded and answered by kindly postal elves. Santa has over five million helpers round the world to answer his mail and deliver the millions of greeting cards, parcels and letters that circulate during the holiday season.

For the UPU, it matters little where Santa lives; he is evidently everywhere. And with its network of 660,000 post offices worldwide, the Post is able to answer all of his letters.

Some interesting facts

- * Countries whose postal operators answer letters to Santa and other end-of-year holiday figures, and the number of letters received in 2006: Germany (500,000), Australia (117,000), Austria (6,000), Bulgaria (500), Canada (1,060,000), Spain (232,000), United States (no figure, as statistics are not kept centrally), Finland (750,000), France (1,220,000), Great Britain (750,000), Ireland (100,000), New Zealand (110,000), Portugal (255,000), Poland (3,000), Slovakia (85,000), Sweden (150,000), Switzerland (17,863), Ukraine (5,019).
- * In 2006, Finland received letters from 150 countries (representing 90% of the letters received), France from 126 countries, Germany from 80 countries and Slovakia from 20 countries.
- * Canada Post replies to letters in 26 languages, Deutsche Post in 16 languages, and France this year specially recruited someone to answer the enormous volume of mail from Russia.
- * In Ukraine, children who send letters by 10 January automatically take part in a lottery offering 1,000 prizes. Other Posts include a small gift with their replies.
- * The US Postal Service has been answering Santa's letters since 1912, the Posts of Switzerland and Austria

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since 1950. In 1950, the Swiss Post received 450 letters, 250 of them from abroad.

* In Canada, Santa has his own postcode - H0H 0H0

* Some operators make it possible to send in e-mail messages which are answered by physical mail. All the same, Santa still receives far more letters than e-mail, proving that kids still write letters.

* As a general rule, Posts recommend clearly indicating a return address on the envelope and not slipping any little treats inside.

* In many countries, stamp collectors and others send their letters to post offices with Christmas-sounding names to have their mail postmarked. Examples in the United States: Christmas (Florida), Bethlehem (Maryland), Hope, Nazareth (Michigan), Saint Joseph (Missouri), Snow Shoe (Pennsylvania). In Canada: Christmas Island (Nova Scotia). Examples in Europe: Berne Bethlehem (Switzerland), St. Nikolaus (Germany), Christkindl (Austria).

About the Universal Postal Union

The UPU, a United Nations specialized agency based in Berne (Switzerland), is the primary forum for cooperation between Posts. In addition to maintaining a genuinely universal network that provides modern products and services, it establishes the rules for international mail exchanges among its 191 members and makes recommendations to stimulate mail volume growth and to improve the quality of service for customers. Each year, more than five million employees process and deliver 433.6 billion domestic letter-post items, some 5.5 billion international items and over 6 billion ordinary parcels.

Web: <http://www.upu.int>



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