

Article and illustration by Bill Naylor

It's here again

Christmas creeps up on you like a dodgy charity collector. One minute you're soaking up the last of the drizzle in the warmest summer on record, (according to the indoor TV weather forecasters, not the shivering blue sunbathers in thermals and balaclavas) next minute the postman is delivering a shed load of 2026 holiday brochures.



All summer in China, where they don't need a weather forecast to convince them every summer is as hot as a wok, they've been churning out Santa Claus onesies and repackaging unsold Chrimbo paraphernalia manufactured when Mao Tse Tung was a boy. China's share of the Christmas goods market is the largest of any nation. Once derided as imitators, they're now accomplished innovators in both high and low-end global markets, whether it's a humanoid robot or an Andrew and Fergie dartboard.

A flood of inflatable Santas and forests of artificial Christmas trees arrive from China, together with miles of outdoor flashing garden lights that depending on taste, are viewed as a decorative addition to the garden or resemble a police motorway accident scene. Not content to rely on toys and other Christmas-related products from yesteryear, the Chinese find time between launching spy programmes worldwide, and ethnic cleaning of indigenous minorities, to produce the latest and most popular Christmas 'must haves' for adults and children. And subsequently, you're inundated by ads for these items on your phones and other devices also manufactured in China. It's extraordinary that this billion-dollar global trade originated from an event that

happened 2,000 years ago, when a young expectant couple travelled to their nearest town on Christmas Eve. Being the Christmas period, the bustling market town of Bethlehem was grid-locked, hand carts and camels were at a standstill, hotels and the Holiday Inns had been booked months in advance. It's unlikely even Lenny Henry could have got a room.

Legend has it that Mary and Joe could only find refuge in a stable. But there's confusion over the term stable. In those days the guest room was the ground floor where livestock were housed of a night. When a prospective guest viewed the room of creature comforts the terms were explained: "This is your room, it's five shekels a night, and the sheep and donkey are extra."

CHRISTMAS

OPENING HOURS



Despite the birth of Mary's boy child being of little interest to the people of Bethlehem at the time, it would be celebrated every year forever more. The only people outside the family who knew the significance of the birth were three perfume salesmen travelling by camels, with only a single bright star acting as a sat nav. Today, even those who initially dread the arrival of Christmas, no matter which supermarket you find yourself in when Noddy's gravelled voice makes the announcement "It's Christ-----mas!", will find they are suddenly transported into festive mode, and can't wait to embrace every glitzy traditional ritual, even agreeing to kiss anyone under the mistletoe. (Depending that is on where they're wearing it.)