

## Dear Santa

The holiday season is a busy time for Santa Claus, not least given the sheer bulk of mail he receives. Indeed, last year 200,000 letters were sent to Santa. Though children in Sweden account for most of the correspondence, the sacks of mail addressed to Santa include letters from around the globe. Santa Claus promises to mail a small gift to each child who prints a legible return address on his or her envelope. You can mail your very own holiday greeting to Santa Claus at the following address: Santa Claus, 173 00 Tomtebodavägen, S-171 81 Tomtebodavägen, Sweden.

Children began writing to Santa Claus over 100 years ago. The tradition dates back to the magazine "Santa Claus," founded in 1891 in a move to spread joy in Swedish homes and to drive young people's imaginations. Swedish Teacher Magazine published one issue every Christmas between 1891 and 1934.

Children wrote letters to the magazine's editors to let them know what they thought of it. Though the magazine's final issue ran in 1935, children have continued to write to "Santa Claus."

Following World War II, children abroad too reasoned that Santa Claus must live in the Nordic region. Santa has received sacks of mail from children around the world ever since. Every year, Santa receives tens of thousands of letters including drawings, wish lists, toys as well as greetings to Santa and his family. About one-fifth of these letters comes from children in other countries, primarily Japan, Italy and the UK.

Sweden Post, which at first didn't know how to handle all the letters addressed to Santa Claus, decided to make sure they reached their intended destination. This was how the "Postal Santa Claus" came into being. Initially, volunteers at the postal building at Skansen handled the practical work of responding to the letters.

Every year, Sweden Post has responded to all the letters and greetings children in Sweden and worldwide have addressed to Santa. Responses have been written in Swedish and English. In addition to a letter from Santa Claus, children also received a small gift. Varying from year to year, gifts have included activity books, puzzles, and postcards featuring a ready-to-color Santa Claus design.

Over the years, many children have mailed their wish lists to Santa. Some include minutely detailed wishes; in fact, one boy asked for a bike, a computer and 19 million Swedish kronor. One girl asked for a little sister, while some children wished for peace on earth. Another little boy asked for a one-way ticket to Indonesia and, if that wasn't possible, two turtles. The most popular wishes in recent years have included Barbie dolls, computer games, Bob the Builder, various cars and children's movies on DVD or VHS.

Many children also send pacifiers, favorite blankets and diapers to Santa in order to demonstrate that they have been good and are well deserving of a Christmas present. Some children write to inform Santa that they don't have a chimney, and that he'll have to use the front door. Toys, books, clothing and other items in good condition are sent to hospital children's wards. Donations also are made to suitable charities, such as Save the Children, Sweden, or a current campaign for needy children.

Click on the following links to view high-resolution images of letters written to Santa Claus:

<http://hugin.info/134112/R/927331/126542.jpg>

<http://hugin.info/134112/R/927332/126543.jpg>

<http://hugin.info/134112/R/925321/125919.jpg>

<http://hugin.info/134112/R/925320/125918.jpg>

Click on the following links to view a high-resolution image of Santa Claus reading children's letters:

<http://hugin.info/134112/R/1018846/160074.jpg>

(Photo: Rickard Kilström)

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### **Please direct questions to:**

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