

Green Christmas



Your ultimate E-book for a
sustainable Christmas





Merry Christmas

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Introduction

When shopping promenades turn into starlit skies and a tantalizing smell of cinnamon and mulled wine is in the air, Christmas can't be far. Hardly any other holiday in Western countries is so irrevocably linked to family traditions than Christmas. Fairy lights, gifts, a decorated Christmas tree and a lavish dinner on Christmas Eve – giving up childhood memories for the sake of a better environment doesn't sound tempting at all, at first.

However, it would be worthwhile to break with old Christmas traditions and replace them with new, more sustainable alternatives. The holiday lights you hoisted onto the roof with your grandpa? Consumes four times more power than a new LED light chain from the hardware store. The traditional Christmas roast? Costs the environment more water than a chicken. That shiny wrapping paper? Can not be recycled. The candles on the Christmas tree are often made out of palm oil, and then there are outdated single use Christmas decorations, like angel hair.

The famous German comedian Loriot (I know... They DO exist!) was right: **There used to be more tinsel.**

The good news is: it is quite possible to celebrate Christmas sustainably – without renouncing all of your childhood memories.

This e-book will show you how. We gathered the best tips and tricks for an environmentally-friendly Christmas feast and we hope you get inspired here and there.

In the meantime, we wish you a wonderful Christmas season and a happy New Year!



Katrin Lüthy

Founder and CEO of The Green Event Planner



O Christmas Tree

Let's start with a topic that is truly unique to Christmas: the lavishly decorated fir. Here's your first important decision towards a more sustainable Christmas party. What is more environmentally-friendly: a real tree or one made out of plastic?

The short answer is:

A real tree is much more ecological than one made out of PVC.

Plastic trees are reusable from year to year, but real trees contributed to air quality while growing, thus made an important contribution to the climate long before Christmas.

Those who decide on a real tree should follow these rules:

1. Local Heroes

The perfect Christmas tree is not only symmetrical and dark green but also doesn't pollute your home with toxic air. It is important to check whether the tree you laid your eyes on was grown and bred in Switzerland, and not on a plantation in Scandinavia or Eastern Europe. Trees from abroad not only waste CO₂ during shipping and transport but are also often covered in toxins and fertilizers that are not even allowed in Switzerland.

Local Christmas trees from particularly sustainable companies are awarded with the FSC label and the Bio Knospe.

2. Swiss Organic Labels

If you want to enjoy your Christmas party without any unpleasant and toxic odours, choose a Swiss fir. These labels guarantee a Swiss origin:

- IG Swiss Christbaum
- Herkunftszeichen Schweizer Holz



3. Perfect timing

If you want to enjoy your tree for more than just a day you should buy it right before Christmas Eve and store it in a cool and humid place, like your balcony or your garage.

4. The full circle

Getting rid of your tree after Christmas is fairly easy in Switzerland. The regular garbage crew will take it with them in January, chop it and compost it. The soil will be sold next year and the recycling circle is complete. Careful with tinsel and candle wax: if there are residues of decoration on the branches, the tree cannot be properly recycled. That also includes artificial snow and white spray paint from a tin.

Important neither Christmas trees nor single branches belong into the fireplace! They are highly flammable and the Swiss Air Pollution Regulation forbids burning firs in your home or outside your house.

5. Live and let live

Struggling with the thought of killing a tree for the sake of a few festive days? Then there's always the possibility of growing your own fir on your balcony. Careful with the temperature change: if you want to move the tree into your apartment during Christmas, move it back to a cooler place right after, like your garage or your cellar. Otherwise, the fir wakes up from hibernation and starts to grow too early in the year.

Not enough space to grow a tree? How about renting one for the season?

www.ecosapin.ch lends living trees in pots for Christmas. You can return it after the holidays.

In Switzerland, one million Christmas trees are sold each year. Half of them are imported from abroad. Unfortunately, that includes the most popular one among Swiss families: the Nordman fir, which has its roots in the Caucasus and is currently bred in Denmark.



Let there be light!

When simple family homes start to look like the milky way, fairy lights are probably at work. The neighbourhood Christmas arms race starts in mid-November and peaks on Christmas eve. Germany consumes 120 million kilowatt hours more in December than in ordinary months. To give you a comparison: you can cook a meal for a family of four with 1 kilowatt hour, or watch TV for 15 hours.

With numbers like these, it is not surprising that eco-friendly lights are a necessity for a sustainable Christmas party. The benefits are quite evident:

- LED lights consume 80 - 90% less energy
- They last much longer, up to 10'000 hours when used indoors
- They are cheaper because they are much more energy efficient



Christmas tree lights left on for 10 hours a day over 12 days of Christmas produce enough Co2 to inflate 12 balloons.

Timer event with the most modern LED system in place, no one needs a light show at 3am! Therefore, investing in a timer is worth your money. The lights switch off automatically every night and you save electricity and tons of money.

Candles Even better for the environment are candles. They light up your room in a cosy, warm yellow and smell like Christmas. Ecologically speaking, there's not much you can do wrong with candles, as long as you make sure they do not contain stearin (palm oil) or paraffin (petroleum).



Christmas decorations

Christmas is red, green and white. When it comes to decorations, Swiss people are surprisingly stubborn and picky. A former work colleague of mine had to learn this the hard way, when he was responsible for the Christmas decoration in one of the biggest shopping malls in Switzerland. To freshen up the décor, his team decided to go for a violet and black Christmas look. It was a total disaster!

This is why Christmas is THE perfect second-hand holiday! The decoration is not subject to change and because all items are only used for a very short period of time each year, the signs of wear and tear are minimal for decades. If you do not want to plunder your parents attic, you should definitely plan a trip to the second-hand store in December. They not only sell cheap decorations but also stylish vintage pieces if you are lucky!

If you want to go sustainable this Christmas, follow the standard Green Event decoration rule: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Reduce

The No. 1 decoration rule from professionals is: less is more. Tons of tiny bells and whistles here and there do not really make a difference. Work towards one or two dramatic eye-catchers!

A large, beautiful Christmas tree in your living room and a couple of LED fairy lights have a much bigger impact than numerous small plastic items and figurines that catch dust on tables, dressers and window frames.

Reuse

No other holiday is so irrevocably linked to childhood memories than Christmas. That's why you don't need to reinvent the decoration wheel every year.

Buy a large storage box and keep the tablecloth from grandma, the tree decorations from Mom and the biscuit box from your aunt for many years to come.

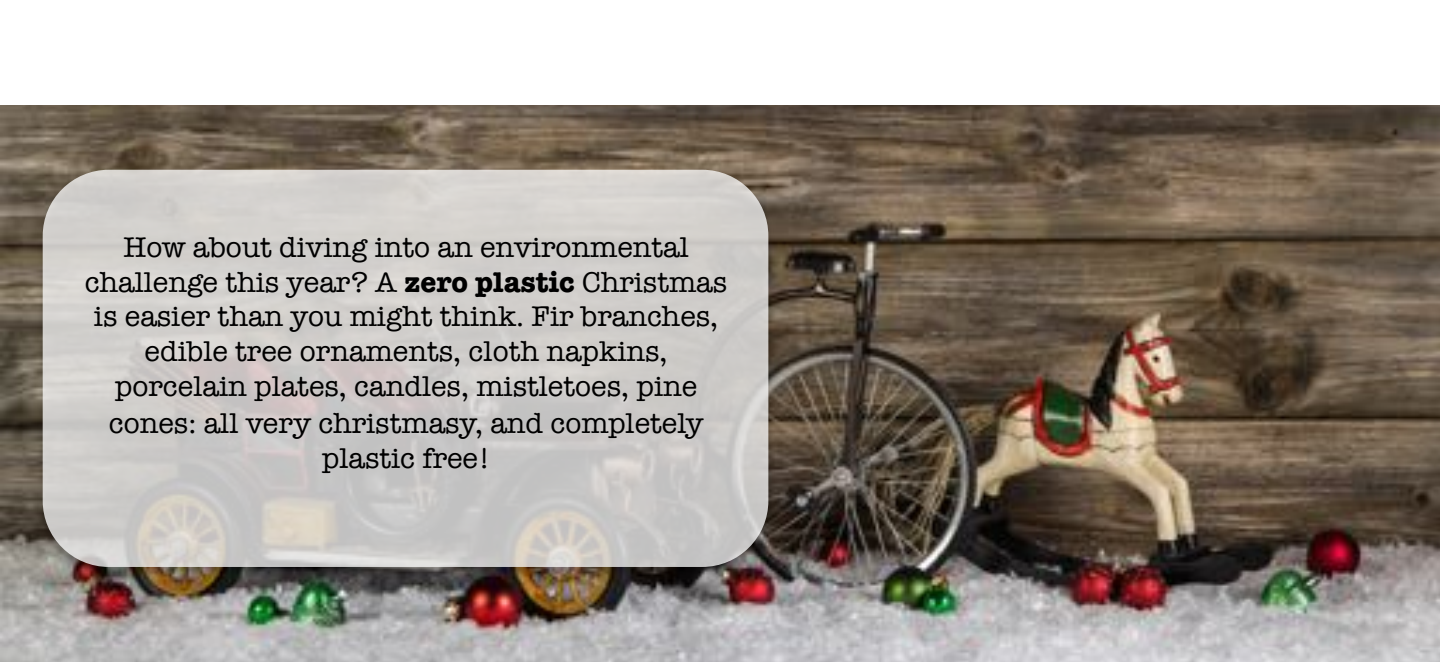
Add new memories to the box each season and enjoy them for as long as possible.

Recycle

Christmas decorations are difficult to recycle. It is often covered in artificial glitter or metal paint, making it impossible to recycle. Even tree baubles cannot be thrown into the waste glass container. They have to go into the regular household trash bin.

That's another reason why you should invest in a few high-quality items that last for a couple of years. It's a win-win: you can keep your memories for many years and the environment won't suffer too much.





How about diving into an environmental challenge this year? A **zero plastic** Christmas is easier than you might think. Fir branches, edible tree ornaments, cloth napkins, porcelain plates, candles, mistletoes, pine cones: all very christmasy, and completely plastic free!

Still need to add bits and bobs to your Christmas decoration this year? Here's your ultimate **shopping list**:

- ✓ Fir branches (if you ask your farmer nicely, you might get them for free)
- ✓ Mistletoe
- ✓ Branches and pine cones
- ✓ High-quality Christmas tree baubles made of glass
- ✓ Cloth napkins
- ✓ Metal- or glass straws
- ✓ Candles without palm oil and petroleum
- ✓ LED-fairy lights
- ✓ Knick-knacks without plastic and preferably second-hand

Stay away from:

- Cheap plastic decorations
- Tinsel and angel hair
- Plastic stickers for your windows
- Artificial snow and white spray paint
- Advent calendars with individually wrapped sweets
- Paper napkins
- Shiny wrapping paper



Dinner is served!

A whopping one third of the world's agricultural land is used for food that will not be eaten. That makes planning your dinner an essential part of your sustainable Christmas party! With a little organization and a lot of courage to reduce food, it is possible to cut food waste and save money. It's a small step for your wallet and a big step for the environment. Here are tips and tricks on how to organize an eco-friendly feast:



Food Waste is the world's third largest climate offender – right behind China and the US. In the UK, no fewer than 26'000 turkeys and 11 million potatoes are thrown away after Christmas. There is lots of room for improvement here!

1. Defrost your freezer

De-ice your refrigerator before the holidays. That will save you energy and leaves much more space for leftover food.

2. Inventory

The main reason for wasted food is not the actual meals but leftover ingredients in the cupboard. Before you walk into the grocery store, sum up all recipe quantities and check your storage cabinet. It might well be that there's enough flour, sugar, eggs and milk in there to cook your whole Christmas dinner – including cookies!

3. Master shopping list

The fewer trips to the grocery store the better for the environment. Driving to the store numerous times with your car not only increases CO₂, but also your stress level! Try to buy everything in one go.

Want to avoid the craziness that is Christmas grocery shopping this year? Click on **www.farmy.ch** and buy everything online. This Swiss online store works with farmers from your area and delivers your food with bikes and e-cars. It doesn't get more much more eco-friendly than that.



4. Plan the menu

There's no question: you can help saving the environment with the right kind of food. If you're not sure what's better for the climate, chicken or beef, we recommend the app on **www.eaternity.org**. There's tons of ecological menu options listed on there.

The rule of thumb is: seasonal and locally grown food always wins the sustainability contest and meat should be consumed in moderation.

5. Check the ingredients

You don't need palm oil for an unforgettable Christmas Eve. Before you put something in your shopping card, check the list of ingredients. And while we're at it: Nestlé is not a necessity, either.

Not sure which ingredients are bad for the environment? Download the app **codecheck.info**, scan the barcode in the store and choose accordingly.

6. Seasonal and locally grown

It kind of goes without saying: the most delicious meal is prepared with seasonal food that is locally grown. Good news for all lovers of tangerines: this winter citrus fruit grow in our neighbourhood and can be enjoyed guilt-free. The same applies to peanuts. They are also imported from Eastern Europe and are therefore much more climate-friendly than for example exotic fruits from Asian and South America.

7. Fair Trade

Ecological cultivation and a fair trade distribution is also a part of sustainability. This is especially important for coffee and chocolate: if you can't spot a fair trade label choose a different product.

8. Avoid unnecessary packaging

Your household waste will increase dramatically over the Christmas period. That's why every single item of packaging counts. Take your own shopping bags with you and use reusable fruit bags. Tangerines and peanuts are sold in bags and in single units – choose the single unit.

9. Zero Waste

Even flour, sugar and co. can be bought without packaging these days! Zero waste stores are popping up everywhere in Switzerland and Christmas is the perfect time to check them out.

Here's a list of zero waste stores in Switzerland is here:

zerowasteswitzerland.ch/de/karte-zws/



10. Tap water instead of bottles

Tap water is up to 1'000 times more environmentally friendly than imported mineral water and 100 times more environmentally friendly than bottled mineral water from your region. Choose tap water if you can.

11. Syrup instead of PET

If water is a bit too boring for your taste, opt for a syrup station on Christmas Eve. Le Sirupier de Berne manufactures organic syrup in Switzerland and bottles it up in glass jars. This saves you from schlepping tons of PET bottles to your house, is much cheaper and cuts down your waste.

3.5 million households in Switzerland consume up to 1.5 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually. With energy-saving cooking methods, this number could be halved. For example: your Christmas roast. If you have the choice between the oven and the stove, choose the stove. A hotplate is much more energy efficient (five times more, in fact!) than the oven.



Energy saving tips:

Fairy lights use up enough energy in December. That's why cutting energy in the kitchen is a necessity during Christmas:

Baking

Baking cookies gets you into the Christmas spirit. If you use the jet-air function of your oven, you use a quarter less energy than with the regular top-and bottom heat option.

Preheating also consumes a lot of energy – and isn't really necessary, unless you bake biscuits. If you use the circulating air function, you can also bake a couple of trays together.

The oven stays heated for quite a while as well. If you can, switch off the oven a couple of minutes before the cookies are done. The residual heat is hot enough to finish the baking.

Cooking

You can save a lot of energy simply by using the right pans. Double walled insulation pans use 60% less energy than non-insulated ones, and a pressure cooker reduces the cooking time by about a third.

Lids also save energy. For example: A kettle with 1.5 litres of water boils 40% faster if you put a lid on.

The size of the pan is crucial as well. If a pot is significantly smaller than the plate, you lose a lot of energy.



A pleasant surprise

The biggest ecological Christmas footprint is not from the tree or the dinner but the gifts. You only need an afternoon in a shopping mall in Switzerland during the Christmas season to see what I mean. The truth is, cutting down on gift-Co2 is not that difficult. The motto is: buy better, wrap better, choose better.

Buy better

Shopping with friends is more fun! You not only share all the stress but also Co2. Taking one car for several people is much better for the environment than driving around alone (and cheaper, too!). If you have to buy gifts by car, why not take friends along? Also, the fewer trips to the mall the better! A shopping list with all of the gifts you need for your friends and family will cut your Christmas shopping in half – I promise.

Those who prefer online shopping should avoid shops that ship singular items. Buy in bulk instead and make sure you will only receive one package. You could also get together with friends and place one big order together! That would cut down your carbon footprint drastically.

There is, however, another argument against online shopping: the packaging. Bubble wrap foil and those small pieces of foam are bad for the environment and very difficult to recycle. The best shopping choice for the climate is still the cosy afternoon stroll in the inner city district that is easily accessible by public transportation.

Wish & Co. I know, buying cheap presents in Asia is incredibly tempting. It is also incredibly bad for the environment. There's the shipping, of course, but also the products themselves are often low quality and covered in cheap plastic. The gifts are likely to break quickly and then cannot be effectively recycled, adding to the waste problem we are facing right now.

And then there's the fair trade aspect as well....



Wrap better

Our British neighbours waste more than 80 square kilometers of gift wrapping paper each year. That's quite the amount, especially because most of it can't be recycled. It has to be thrown away in your regular household waste. The reason for this is quite simple: holiday wrapping paper often has a shiny, plastic top coat, that makes it hard to effectively recycle. Even worse is wrapping paper with glitter on it, that one has to go into the trash as well. If you want to wrap your gifts sustainably, you unfortunately have to stay away from everything that shimmers.

Mathematical wrapping formula
according to Warwick Dumas:

$$A=2(ab + ac + bc + c^2)$$

A = the total area of the gift

a = the longest side of the gift

c = the shortest

b = the remaining sides



The most eco-friendly choice when it comes to presents is the famous neutral brown paper. It not only looks quite chic but also protects the environment. If you want to go the extra mile, swap your plastic ribbons with ones that are made from natural materials, like raffia.

With a bit of creativity, your presents will look absolutely stunning- pinky promise.

Reuse: Even if you use recycling paper, it is a bit wasteful to throw everything away right after Christmas. Bigger pieces of paper can easily be reused for smaller presents.

If the wrapping paper looks worn out, you can always try to iron it. A warm ironing board will make lines and folds disappear.



Choose better

Finding the perfect Christmas present is difficult at best. If you add sustainability to your shopping list, it can get even more complicated.

That is why we put together a list of eco-friendly and sustainable gift ideas.

The ideal Christmas present:

1. ... Doesn't gather dust

Even if you spoil the surprise: if you're not sure what a person wants for Christmas, you might want to ask. It's always better to give something that a person really needs instead of something rather random that will only gather dust. If you insist on the surprise, ask for a wish list and choose one item to buy.

Less exciting perhaps, but very effective are vouchers. Nicely wrapped, they are a great way to reduce unnecessary waste after the holidays.

And while we're at it, a donation in a friend of family members name is always a very lovely, eco-friendly and sustainable present.

2. ... Keeps on giving

Buying cheap gifts is certainly tempting for your wallet, but it's just wasteful for the environment. Make sure that your presents are durable and won't break after a couple of days.

3. ... Runs without batteries

Batteries are rather poisonous for the environment and quite difficult to recycle. If you must buy electronics, add rechargeable batteries to the gift.

4. ... Is not made of plastic

There's no real need for plastic under the Christmas tree. Wooden items last much longer and are on trend this year!

5. ... Tastes better

Not surprisingly, adults are usually quite happy with high-quality treats! Toffees from that famous bakery they rarely go to, coffee beans from the trendy restaurant next door or artisanal Raclette cheese straight from hipster heaven: you can't go wrong with food.

6. ... Is made with love

Liqueurs, juices, jams and goodies. Homemade is the way to go. Even knitted scarves and hand-embroidered napkins make quite an impression.

7. ... Is fairly traded

If you don't have time for a crafting afternoon (we are totally with you!) should check the fair trade labels on potential presents. Fair trade is also a big part for a more sustainable future.

8. ... Is locally grown

Christmas is such a great time to support your local community and business. Why not shop local this year?



Cards

The Swiss postal service is drowning in work around Christmas. That's not just because online shopping peaks in December, but also because Christmas cards are still a thing. Even if there's a decline in seasons greeting cards each year, there are still some traditionalists out there who send them in bulk.

Luckily, there are a plethora of eco-friendlier options here:

- E-cards are not only much more environmentally-friendly, they also arrive instantly
- Seasons video greetings are a great novelty. With mobile phones on hand, they are quite easy to shoot these days
- A tad bit more time consuming but incredibly touching nonetheless are personal phone calls. How about spending a Sunday this year on the phone and call relatives and friends you haven't seen in a while? I'm sure this personal touch will have a more lasting impact than a simple card

Company gifts Let's talk business for a moment. I can't tell my corporate clients this enough: please invest in high-quality goodie bags. Sustainability is the trend of the hour, even in Switzerland, and a cheap plastic gift could backfire quite drastically. It's much better to either give less or better. Food is always a winner, but if you're looking for something that lasts a bit longer, make sure your goodies are fair trade, high-quality, made from organic materials and above all: useful.

Grinch, your name is GDPR

Beware of corporate Christmas greetings this year. The new data policy doesn't make an exception for holiday greetings. Before you start sending out e-cards, you might want to check in with your data policy officer. Clients (that includes private customers) who did not opt-in should not be contacted (at least commercially!) at Christmas, either.

It might be better to use your social media accounts for Christmas greetings this year.



Transport

Having a car makes Christmas so much easier. From shopping sprees to family gatherings, driving around in your own car reduces the stress levels drastically. However, cars are notoriously dreadful for the climate. If you're hosting a sustainable Christmas this year, planning your trips is key.

1. Master shopping list

Grocery shopping around Christmas is nerve-racking at best. That's why a master shopping list is a necessity this year. Try to buy as many items as possible in one go. Food can be kept quite long, especially if you keep it in the fridge. Finish your grocery shopping early and drive only one car.

2. Use bicycle couriers

Gifts for your beloved city slickers do not have to be sent by mail. Use bicycle couriers instead. They are much more ecological and deliver within a day.

3. Send online gifts without a box stop

Online gifts for friends and family members that you can't visit during the Christmas break should go straight from the store to their house, without stopping at yours first. If you have friends abroad, it will also make sense to use local online stores that operate in their country. That would lower your carbon footprint quite dramatically.

4. GoGreen

Courier companies like DHL and FedEx offer sustainable shipping solutions. It might be worth asking before you post your parcels.



Motivate your family to organize **carpools** on Christmas Eve. That will not only save tons of CO₂, you'll also have more drinking buddies at the party. The perfect designated driver has a modern car, knows how to drive in low gear and keeps his jacket on while driving instead of using the heater.



Waste & Recycling

Christmas is the season to be jolly. It's also the season to go a bit overboard with waste. Between Christmas Eve and New Year, the amount of trash in Swiss households increases by 20 – 30 percent. That is why it is crucial to recycle at Christmas. First, you'll save a lot of money and secondly New Year resolutions are right around the corner. If you want to add "sustainability" to your plans for next year, it would definitely make sense to start at Christmas already.

Here are a few tips to reduce your waste at Christmas this year:

1. The Christmas Tree

In Switzerland, the Christmas trees will be picked up by your local garbage collectors in January. The exact date is usually on your city's website. Careful with tinsel and candle wax: if there are residues on the Christmas tree, it unfortunately can't be composted.

2. Leftover food

Even with the best intentions at heart, leftover food will probably follow you around between Christmas and New Year. Defrost your freezer before the holidays to make sure there's enough room in there for delicious leftover holiday food.

The rest can go into the compost bin in front of your house.

3. Cardboard & Paper

The Swissies are world champions in recycling cardboard and paper. This is where your (non-shiny!) wrapping paper and your online shipping boxes go – free of charge.

4. Cork

Cheers to Christmas! And return the corks of your wine bottles here: www.korken.ch

5. Batteries

Batteries shouldn't go into the trash. Please return them for free at your local grocery store.

6. Bottles, cans, PET

Glass bottles belong in the glass recycling containers, cans go straight into the aluminium containers (usually right next to the glass bottle recycling station) and PET can be returned to your local grocery store.

7. Fairy lights

All electronic stores in Switzerland will take your broken fairy lights and recycle them for you – free of charge.

8. Christmas Decorations

Broken Christmas baubles can't be thrown into the glass recycling containers, unfortunately. Throw them into your household trash, along with all plastic decoration, tinsels and Co.

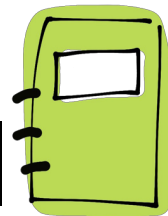




Disclaimer

This free e-book was written by Katrin Lüthy, founder and CEO of The Green Event Planner. Whole passages and individual sections of the text may not be copied without written consent.

THE GREEN EVENT PLANNER



The Green Event Planner is your specialist for sustainable and ecological event solutions in Switzerland. The event agency in Zurich focuses on eco-friendly and creative new ways to celebrate – without harming the environment.

We host private gatherings such as birthdays as well as client events, meetings and conferences. We aim to host top notch events with a green twist, from organic catering companies to sustainable products and cutleries.

If you have questions, just drop us a note:

info@thegreeneventplanner.com

In the meantime, we wish you a fantastic Christmas and all the best for next year.