says. In the absence of a frenzied Boxing Day and January sales culture, the broader festive celebrations continue well into mid-January, albeit in a more subdued, relaxed style.

The Finns seem to have a particularly nailed down this approach to Christmas. A special ceremony on December 24, kicks off a 20-day season of relaxed and laidback living, named Christmas Peace.

Without the rush to enjoy Christmas across a more limited number of days, the Scandinavians (and Finns) are free to enjoy the season in a more relaxed way, as in the build-up period of advent.

Tarvet says there is another untranslatable Danish word fundamental to how Danes celebrate Christmas – *Janteloven* – expressing a concept that you are not to act as if you are special or better than anybody else. Such an attitude can certainly help to significantly de-stress Christmas.

And there is, he says, something else quite distinctive about a Danish Christmas – the annual rituals celebrated in a quite uniform way, across the country, with little deviation from family to family.

"There is a very conservative aspect to Danish family life, which is perhaps antithetical to the progressiveness we associate with the country," he says. "But Denmark is a very homogenous culture. Even the welfare state is a product of simply having so much in common."

A Swedish Christmas is similarly traditional. Alexandra Lotz and Gary Lee have been together for 12 years and have a little girl, Astrid. They have lived in both Sweden and England.

Lotz says her experiences of celebrating Christmas as a child in Sweden were characterised by lots of candles, music and of course, the Christmas tree. Also, after Christmas Eve dinner, Santa knocks on the door and hands out the presents.

"I really like the big tradition of the advent lights, the Christmas calendar and the fact that Santa hands out the presents. I want to create the same Christmas experience for Astrid. I remember how exciting it was as a kid.

"When I was little my parents used to tell me to write a wishlist to Santa and place it in the window of my bedroom. The next morning the list would be gone."

She says a Swedish Christmas demonstrates how traditional Swedes can be, in a somewhat old-fashioned way.

"Old Nordic characters appear over Christmas" she says. "There's the 'Julbock' [the 'Christmas goat' that dates back to the Norse god Thor]. And the small gnomes, 'tomtar', from old Nordic tales, said to look after farms and farm animals at night."

Lotz tells me one of the things her English husband finds most unusual about a Swedish Christmas is that the whole family gathers around the television at three o'clock on Christmas Eve to watch the *Christmas Host* – a show that consists of a series of Disney clips. "Gary finds this absurd!" she admits. "Why would you watch the same show every year?"

Lee's childhood Christmases in the UK were very traditional: a big family breakfast, opening and playing with presents, then going to his grandparents for roast turkey. He now celebrates the Swedish way, on Christmas Eve, and has noticed many other differences.

"There's no great rush to open presents," he says. "The present opening takes place after food, which seems to simultaneously raise the excitement and expectation, and take focus away from the whole day being solely about presents.

"Also, a family member usually makes some excuse to leave ('oh, we need milk..' etc) and then dresses up as a kind of scary Father Christmas, knocks on the door, and gives out some presents to the kids."

For one who did not grow up with Swedish Christmases, though, he says the best thing is the sense of cosiness.

"The whole month of December is all about candles and bringing light to the darkness. It's less religious, which I like. It's very traditional.

"They do it quite tastefully too, less garish – it's quite hard to describe without sounding like I'm in some way looking down on English Christmas (which I also love). But Christmas in Sweden is just lovely."

Rice pudding

EAT LIKE A SCANDI THIS CHRISTMAS

DENMARK

A popular Christmas snack are little spherical pancakes called Æbleskiver, dipped in jam, often accompanied with Gløgg, a mulled wine with added almonds and raisins. For pudding with their Christmas dinner (on December 24), Danes eat a rice pudding dessert (risengrød), made with whipped cream and chopped almonds, finished with warm cherry sauce. A single full almond is hidden somewhere in the pudding, and whoever finds it wins a present, traditionally a small marzipan pig.

SWEDEN

A typical Christmas smörgåsbord features ham, pork sausage, an egg and anchovy mix (gubbröra), herring salad, pickled herring, home-made liver pâté, wort-flavoured rye bread (vörtbröd), potatoes and lutfisk. This dish is dried fish, soaked in water and lye to swell before it is cooked. The ham is first boiled, then glazed with a mixture of egg, breadcrumbs and mustard.

NORWAY

The main Christmas meal varies according to region. The most common dish is 'ribbe' – roast pork belly – but alternatives include lamb ribs or cod. Turkey is a big favourite... on New Year's Eve.

TASTES THAT TRAVEL: SURPRISING ORIGINS OF OUR FOOD NAMES

Where do currants, quince and damsons come from? **PETER TRUDGILL** traces their etymological roots

Anyone who's ever eaten a hamburger will know that it has nothing to do with ham. But since we now have beefburgers and cheeseburgers, and even just burgers, it is rather obvious that the word *hamburger* has lost all the connections it used to have with the city of Hamburg.

This food item was originally called a Hamburger steak, and represented a way of cooking and serving minced beef which was typical of Hamburg. A *frankfurter* was similarly a type of sausage associated with Frankfurt.

Different types of fruit, too, are named after specific places. It is fairly obvious that *tangerines* are named after the Moroccan city of Tangiers.

And it is not too surprising to learn that the word *damson* comes from Damascus: the original English name was *damascene* 'from Damascus', and the Latin name for the fruit was *prunum damascenum* 'plum of Damascus'. It is possible that damsons were first cultivated in Syria and introduced into Britain by the Romans.

But it is not immediately obvious that the word *currant* is also derived from a place-name. The place in question is the town of Corinth – Kórinthos, in Greek – which must have been one of the areas which currants were originally exported from.

They were known in the mediaeval Anglo-Norman French of England as *raisins de Corauntz* 'grapes of Corinth' (from French *raisins de Corinthe*), and then during the 1400s this started being reduced to simply *corauntz*, *corantes*, and then *currants*. It is easier to see the Greek geographical origin of the word in the German name for the dried fruit, *Korinthe*, as well as in Swedish *korint* and Finnish *korintti*. Dutch *krent*, though, is much harder to unravel.

The way in which the word *quince* derives from the name of another Greek town is even more convoluted. The town in question is Canea (in Greek, Chaniá) in Crete. The modern name Chaniá probably comes from Arabic *hani* 'hostel, inn' – much of Crete was under Arab control from 824 to 961.

But the original name of the town, which had been built on the site of a Minoan settlement, was Kydonía. The modern Greek name for quince is *kydóni*, and the Ancient Greek name for the fruit was *milon Kydonion* 'apple of Kydonía'.

Mediaeval English *quinse* or *quyns* was originally the plural of a form derived from Old French *cooin* (the modern French is *coing*). *Cooin* came from Latin *cotoneum*, an abbreviation of *malum cotoneum* (the modern Italian is still *mela cotogna*). The Latin phrase had originally been *malum Cydonium*, a borrowing from the Ancient Greek *melon Kydonion* 'apple of Kydonía'.

The Estonian word *küdoonia* and the Latvian *cidonija* still show the supposed origin of the name of the fruit in the town of Kydonía rather clearly. It is a little harder to see the connection in the Slovenian version *kutine*. And the German word *Quitte* and Norwegian word *kvede* make it even harder for us to detect the link – but these words do ultimately go back to Kydonía too.

Whether quinces really had anything to do with Kydonía/Chaniá in the first place is another matter, however.

The very earliest Ancient Greek form of the name of the fruit was *kodýmalon*, and it is possible that this was a word borrowed into Greek from some other language – possibly an ancient tongue of Asia Minor, if that is where the fruit originally came from.

The transformation of *kodýmalon* into *Kydonion milon* would then have been a case of folk etymology: Ancient Greek speakers tried to make sense of what, to them, was a nonsensical non-Greek word by turning it into Greek, much as some English speakers from the 1600s onwards took to changing the – to them – meaningless Latin term *asparagus* into the more meaningful 'sparrow grass', even though many of them must have known that sparrows do not normally eat grass.

PEACH

The English word *peach* came from Old French *pesche*. This had descended from mediaeval Latin *persica*, from Classical Latin *persicum malum*, which meant 'Persian apple'. The German name for peach, *Pfirsich*, shows this belief about the geographical origin of peaches more directly. In actual fact, though, botanists believe that peaches originally came from China.