

Thousands of Santas take part in charity fun runs across British towns and cities

Thousands of people dressed up as Santa for charity fun runs — turning town and city centres into a sea of red and white across the country

Runners from Aberdeen in Scotland through to Southsea, Hampshire, on the south coast took part in the charity events.

Even a week of snowfall did not stop the annual race in Edinburgh city centre where an estimated 800 runners young and old took part. The races happened in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Oxford and Southsea — and there was one in bathing costumes in Budapest, Hungary as well. The 1.5 kilometre sprint, walk or toddle in Edinburgh was held to raise cash for the children's charity When You Wish Upon A Star.

Leading the festive fancy dress run was Mark Cooper, who ran 50 marathons in 56 days for charity earlier this year.

Margaret Rowarth, Scottish appeals manager for When You Wish Upon A Star, said, "This event has a magical atmosphere and people are always so charitable. The support has been incredible and all money raised will go to grant the wishes of Scottish children in 2011."

Jackie Gott, managing director with event producer *She's Gott*



Runners dressed as Santa Claus take part in the annual Santa Run in Battersea Park, in London

It! said, "This is a fantastic event that all the family, young and old, can take part in. There's a wonderful atmosphere throughout and it's amazing to see so many people come together in the

name of charity. It's a fantastic spectacle, whether you're watching or participating, and we are absolutely thrilled with the turnout of Santas and elves today."

Sincere thanks are due not

only to the City of Edinburgh Council and Edinburgh's Christmas producers, *She's Gott It!*, but also to the dozens of volunteers from Telford College who helped on the day.

EU plans cross-border data sharing for vehicles

EU drivers who commit serious traffic offences in other countries in the bloc could soon find themselves in trouble when they go home

Transport ministers in Brussels have approved legislation allowing national authorities to give one another access to vehicle registration details.



"Even within the Schengen area, information about who is where, for example passing on license numbers, is not allowed. Generally sharing information doesn't happen, even with neighbouring countries. When we flash foreign drivers, most of the time we are on a hiding to nothing, it is too hard to track them down. The system needs to be standardised and it would be great if we could then have access to that data so we can chase up people who have infringed the law in Belgium," said Daniel de Nève of the Belgian Federal Police.

Fake Faberge eggs seized at Paris's Charles de Gaulle

French customs officials say they have seized some 350 fake Faberge eggs, which were intended for sale during the busy Christmas season

The counterfeit copies of the famous Faberge collection were discovered in a cargo coming from Russia at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport last month. Faberge confirmed the eggs — which were displayed at the airport — were fake.

Faberge created some 50 jewelled eggs for Russia's imperial



French customs warehouse of a part of the 350 fake Faberge eggs

family starting in the 1880s. The eggs were commissioned in the Russian Orthodox tradition of

exchanging decorated eggs for Easter. They have since become synonymous with luxury.

BAA urges British government to slash air passenger duty

The British Airports Authority (BAA) has called on the UK government to reduce Air Passenger Duty (APD), the tax on flights to and from the UK, which was increased last month

BAA urged the government pointing to the Irish government's announcement that it would cut its air travel tax by 70 percent from March 2011. Even though for a limited period, the reduction is expected to boost Ireland's economy, which is in crisis, through tourism.

"The Irish recognise that aviation is fundamental to their recovery and this is very much something ministers in the UK need to take note of," Nigel Milton, Policy Director at Heathrow Airport, said.

In 2009, the Netherlands took off air tax completely. UK is now being urged to follow similar steps, if not remove tax completely, at least drop it to satisfactory levels. According to BAA, last month's increase in APD has made air tax in the UK highest in the world.

While the UK government had defended its move to increase APD stating that it was a chief contributor to the public finances that would help the government achieve its environmental goals, widespread opposition from travel firms and airways followed. Officials from British Airways feared the hike would badly affect the business in holiday season. Industry experts expressed that huge tax hikes would discourage long-haul travel and hinder the economies of various countries.

Brazil architect opens museum at 103

Celebrated Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer has marked his 103rd birthday by opening a museum of his work

The Oscar Niemeyer Foundation outside Rio de Janeiro houses drawings and models from the modernist architect's 70 year career. Mr. Niemeyer designed Brazil's futuristic capital, Brasilia, as well as the UN building in New York. His latest work — the Oscar Niemeyer cultural centre in Aviles in northern Spain — has also opened. "My friends have come to see me, how nice," Mr. Niemeyer told reporters at the inauguration of his foundation in the city of Niteroi, outside Rio de Janeiro.

Designed by Mr. Niemeyer himself, the museum building boasts the sensuous concrete curves that define his distinctive modernist style and have made him one of the world's most famous architects. Niteroi is already home to a number of classic Niemeyer buildings, including a contemporary art museum and a theatre. On the same day, the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation was opened in Brazil, officials in Aviles in northern Spain opened the main dome of the Oscar Niemeyer Cultural Centre, which he also designed.

The authorities in Aviles hope the centre will revive the city's fortunes in the same way the Guggenheim museum helped transform the city of Bilbao from a declining industrial city into a cultural capital. Mr. Niemeyer went on to create more than 600 buildings around the world. Despite recurring illness over the past year, he is still at work, and still showing his flair for dramatic architecture.

UAE hotel boasts 'most expensive Christmas tree ever'

A glitzy hotel in Abu Dhabi has put on show a jewel-encrusted Christmas tree which it says is worth over \$11m (£7m)

Items of jewellery studded with scores of precious stones are draped on the tree's branches, along with more traditional baubles and lights. While the tree alone is worth a mere \$10,000, the jewellery adds more than \$11m to the value, said the hotel's general manager Hans Olbertz. He admitted the idea for the tree was hatched by the hotel's marketing team. The hotel has a tree every year, Mr. Olbertz said.

But this year, according to Mr. Olbertz, 'we said we have to do something different'. The vast majority of the population of the oil-rich UAE are Muslim. But Mr. Olbertz said he did not think the tree would offend local sensibilities. "It's a very liberal country," he said.

The Emirates Palace hotel would ask the Guinness World Records to certify the tree as the world's most expensive, Mr. Olbertz said.

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