

LearnEnglish would like to thank Pieter Donche, who allowed us to use the text 'The medieval travelling salesman' from his fascinating **calendar stories** website. On that site it explains:

*"Nowadays New Year is celebrated on January 1. But this has not always been so. In the past often another date was chosen as the starting day of the year. December 25, March 1, March 25, Easter, and September 1 have been in use as well ... The use of different styles at the same time, must have caused much confusion in international relations".*

## The medieval travelling salesman

Imagine what could happen to a Greek merchant from Byzantium, in the early 14th century, wanting to explore trading opportunities in Northern Italy. Leaving his metropolis on 1 December 1300, after a long sailing trip he arrives in Venice at the beginning of January. Two weeks later, he succeeds in closing a deal with the Venetian merchants. It would be recorded as 15 January 1299.

In Genoa he meets an imprisoned man who tells him wonderful stories from his lifetime travels in the East (Marco Polo). Impressed, he wants to see more of the world and sets off for Barcelona, where his arrival is recorded as 15 February 1300.

A week later he leaves for Paris and arrives in the city on the 15 March 1299.

Since London is not so far away he decides to cross the Channel to have a look over there, where he arrives on New Year's Day, 25 March 1300.

But London was a much smaller city than Paris at that time, so, a bit disappointed he returns to Paris where he arrives 7 April 1299.

Just in time for the Easter and New Year's festivities of 10 April.

In Paris he extends his trading relations and is granted a loan by Italian bankers who believe in his plans.

Much satisfied, he returns home and arrives in Byzantium on New Year's Eve, 31 August 1300.

In 7 months he has celebrated 3 times New Year's Day...

(In 1299/1300 New Year was celebrated in Byzantium on 1 September, in Barcelona on 25 December, in Paris (with Easter) on 10 April 1300, and in London on 25 March, which explains the bizarre chronology in his travel diary)