

Doc Martin Christmas Special

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[Drama](#)

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Christmas is coming to Portwenn as Martin Clunes returns to play the nation's favourite grumpy medic in a one off special of ITV's hugely successful drama Doc Martin.

Following the ratings success of the final, tenth series in the Autumn, Martin Clunes, reprises the role of Dr Martin Ellingham, the GP with a brusque bedside manner and a phobia of blood, for one last time in this Christmas treat, produced by Buffalo Pictures and set in the idyllic hamlet of Portwenn.

The series ended on a high with nearly six million viewers tuning in to find out whether the Doc would accept a prestigious post in London, or stay in Portwenn. A near fatal accident prompted the Doc re-consider his priorities. He decided that his wife and family must come first, and that they should all stay in Portwenn.

Picturesque Port Isaac provides the beautiful wintry backdrop for the festive special, with all the regular members of the cast reprising their roles.

Caroline Catz plays Doc Martin's wife, Louisa Ellingham, Dame Eileen Atkins plays Doc Martin's formidable Aunt Ruth. Ian McNeice is back to play Bert Large, with Joe Absolom as his son Al. John Marquez is PC Joe Penhale, Jessica Ransom is the doctor's receptionist, and Al's wife, Morwenna, and Selina Cadell is pharmacist Mrs Tishell. They are joined by guest stars Ron Cook, Claire Bloom and Emma Amos.

Portwenn is full of festive fun, until Doc Martin has the grotto closed down because he fears Santa has something contagious, upsetting the children, including his own son James (Elliott Blake). While awaiting the results of the tests to find out why Leonard (Santa, played by Ron Cook) is so itchy the Doc tells him he cannot be Santa until they have the diagnosis.

Leonard is determined to show the Doc the magic of Christmas, and tries to deliver the Ellingham's Christmas presents down the chimney. Martin is furious, and remonstrates with Leonard for putting himself at risk on the roof of their house, unaware James has witnessed it all. James decides to run away to find Santa, but Ruth bumps into him and persuades him to have breakfast, given the journey to the North Pole is a long one.

To try to make up for James' disappointment at not meeting Santa, Louisa decides, with the help of the village, to arrange a lantern parade, led by Santa, something she has fond memories of from when she was a child in Portwenn. PC Joe Penhale is thrilled to be asked to don his Santa suit and lead the parade.

But parish councillor Agatha Higgins (Emma Amos), objects to the plan, because the event doesn't meet certain requirements, not least the health and safety risks. Louisa tries to change her mind by inviting her to their parade meeting on the Platt where Christmas preparations are in full swing. Agatha seems to be getting into the festive spirit when she guesses the weight of the turkey, but before she can confirm the parade can go ahead, she trips and hits her head on the floor, and an ambulance has to be called.

A delighted Mrs Tishell finds herself under the mistletoe with the Doc after he notices her choking for a second time. Fearing she has a serious illness and that this might be her last Christmas, she just can't resist stealing a Christmas kiss. Martin is appalled by her advances, but as a result diagnoses her with a manageable condition, not a life threatening illness. He also tells her the

prolapsed disc has healed, so she no longer has to wear her neck brace. But Mrs Tishell is not sure she wants to abandon the neck brace.

Morwenna can't help but have a seemingly irrational liking for the turkey, naming it Toby. After Agatha guesses the correct weight, Morwenna decides to take it to the butcher herself. Al doesn't believe her when she says the turkey escaped on the way to the butcher, but her reasoning quickly helps him understand why she set it free.

Meanwhile PC Joe Penhale's romantic attempt to woo Janice by showering her with gifts backfires when she thinks she is being stalked.

Martin is called out to see Leonard (Santa) who has had an accident, and as he is anaemic he cannot afford to lose any blood. As Martin is driving to Leonard's house the weather is getting worse and he has an accident, which causes him to hallucinate about his mother (Claire Bloom), prompting some of his own parenting concerns. Eventually making it to Leonard's house and recovering from the cold, he treats Leonard. Leonard confides in Martin about the death of his wife and why he celebrates Christmas. He challenges Martin to do the same. But will they make it back to the village in time for the Christmas parade Louisa has organised?

The Doc Martin Christmas Special was written by Jack Lothian, directed by Nigel Cole. The producer is Philippa Braithwaite and the executive producer is Mark Crowdy.

Martin Clunes plays Dr Martin Ellingham

The final series has gone out on a high in the ratings with viewers asking for more.

It is lovely so many people tuned in and enjoyed this last series.

The audience figures are very gratifying. If you were looking for another commission you'd punch the air, but even though we are not looking for another commission, we can still punch the air because it is nice to go out on a high.

When I went to have my flu jab at my local medical centre the day after the final episode went out one of the doctors said to me 'that was a fantastic episode last night'. That was really nice from a doctor, and the nurse who'd given my me jab said 'shut up I haven't watched it yet'. That was gratifying. We hope all those loyal viewers will enjoy the Christmas special.

What was it like on set when you filmed the final scenes of the series?

It was absolutely lovely. It was a hot summer's day and we were filming a scene from episode seven with Jessica Ransom, Joe Absolom, Vincent Franklin and Beth Goddard. The sea looked like it was the Mediterranean, and just out of vision on the left was beach full of people doing what people do in Cornwall, families loving the beach and the ocean and dogs swimming around. It felt like it was the right way to say goodbye to Cornwall.

It was emotional but I didn't see anyone crying. It was more elation to have got to the end of nearly six months of filming.

The scene where you threw the For Sale notice for the Doc's house over the cliff echoed a scene from the very first episode. Were there moments from the final series which tied up loose ends from previous series?

It was an echo to a scene at the end of the first episode in series one. In our mind the big revelation was when the Doc, who's always hated dogs, let the dog, Chicken (played by Taffy) into the house in the final scene of the final series, having always shoved him out the door from the word go.

What is your favourite memory of the whole ten series?

It was all jam. May be just that memory of being on the beach when it was lovely and sunny and Cornish. I couldn't single out one memory.

Did you take a souvenir from the production and/or Port Isaac to remind you of your time on Doc Martin?

I really wanted the spaniel model which stood outside the pharmacy for people to put money in for charity. It was pointed out that it belonged to a hire company and that they don't usually part with them. But somehow my wife got it and gave it to me. It is now very proudly in the entrance hall to our house.

What can we look forward to in the Christmas episode?

Snow, Christmas lights, the lovely Claire Bloom came back to play the character of the Doc's mother, and Ron Cook as Santa.

You can imagine the doctor isn't too keen on Christmas for his own tortured reasons. It's never stopped making me laugh, I don't know why because if it was a real person who had had such an awful upbringing you'd feel nothing but pity for them, but because it is him it just makes me laugh.

How did his tortured childhood affect the Doc's approach to the festive season?

As a child his parents abandoned him on Christmas Day, leaving him with a pencil set and an orange in his Christmas stocking.

It has just slightly scarred him, and also with his cynical view of everything, he thinks it is all a lot of nonsense and was an invention to hide a Pagan festival.

His son James is trying to get into the spirit of Christmas and Louisa is trying to engage with James' engagement so there's a sort of impasse between Louisa, James and the Doc.

Then there's Leonard played by Ron Cook, who has his own personal problems with Christmas - his wife, who loved Christmas, died five years ago just two days before Christmas - although he is solving it by entering into the celebration and playing Santa.

We saw a softer, more compassionate Doc in the final scenes of the last series, does he return to being his grumpy self in the Christmas episode?

The soft side was due to a massive loss of blood! That's his excuse. He is a bit grumpy because of all the festive nonsense, and he is not sure his son should be infected by such nonsense, and wants him to place it where he places Christmas in his mind.

He manages to upset the children of Portwenn by closing down Santa's Grotto?

He thinks Santa may have something contagious because he is itching and scratching, and the children can't be put at risk, even though it is upsetting for them. His son James is so upset at not meeting Santa he tries to run away to the North Pole in search of him.

James doesn't want to speak to his father, nobody wants to speak to him - but he's been there before.

When was the Christmas episode filmed?

It was filmed in February. It was the first thing we shot, before shooting the series. We needed North Cornwall's trees not to have any leaves, and have it looking wintry, and it was. I discovered electric clothes to keep me warm. They

are fantastic. It's a gilet, and you use a power bank, like you'd charge your phone with, and it has three different settings to keep you warm. I turned it up to the max.

There was a major storm which affected the filming - the Christmas tree on the Platt had to be taken down before it was blown down?

It was a major storm, Storm Eunice, and one day we had to get all the actors out of the trailers and into the production office for safety, because the wind was rocking the trailers around. The props team had to take down the huge Christmas tree they'd placed on the Platt for fear of it being blown over. When we were filming in the studio in a barn on the farm there was a worry, but we carried on.

Just a month after finishing filming Doc Martin you flew to Papua New Guinea to begin filming a new documentary series for ITV about the Islands of the Pacific?

It was absolutely fantastic, and it felt very different from the first series of the Islands of the Pacific. Because of the logistics of Papua New Guinea we were far more embedded. We lived in this village on the Trobriand Islands where they built us huts and we lived with them for the whole time we were there - seven to eight days. We got to see their lives, and visited other villages nearby and got to really see the tribal nature of how they live.

We then went to the the Philippines, and finally to Guam and Halau.

Having spent so much time away this year you must be looking forward to spending time at home with your family at Christmas?

We had six days between the first two blocks of filming to make space for the World Clydesdale Show, of which I am president. (Martin is a keen heavy horse enthusiast, himself owning two Clydesdale horses, Ronnie and Bruce) I got to spend one night at home then went up to Aberdeen for the show.

Every morning I woke up and I wondered where I was and which bed I was in. This morning I woke up at quarter to six thinking 'where am I and where have I got to go'. It was the first morning I've thought, I live here. It's a real adjustment when you wake up and look around the room, looking for familiar things, and thinking which hut am I in?

What are your plans for Christmas?

We have all the family coming to us, which is a joy, and we all share the cooking.

What are your favourite memories of Christmas?

I remember the weight of the stocking on the end of the bed. Mum would wrap each present in paper, things she had gathered through the year, which goes on here now at Christmas.

What was your favourite Christmas present?

I was very excited when I got a Corgi James Bond car which had a little figure you could flip out the roof. But it broke.

What would you most like for Christmas this year?

I'd like a trip somewhere - we buy each other trips rather than stuff -last year we went to Madeira.

What is next?

I start working on a new drama for ITV next year about county lines crime.

Caroline Catz plays Louisa Ellingham

What was the reaction from viewers to the final series of Doc Martin?

It was a lovely experience having people coming up and saying how much they were enjoying it and how they didn't want it to come to an end. It is really sad that it is over. It has been such a huge part of my life, and my family's life, but it is absolutely the right moment to close the book on our story.

I am excited about that, there are new things for me, but also because it has been so successful and it has given so much happiness to so many people, including all of us who are in it. It is a winner for all.

You have been in Prague filming a new project were you able to watch the series as it was transmitted?

I have been watching Doc Martin mostly on catch up. I have just finished filming in Prague and it is lovely to be back here and hearing everyone's reaction to Doc Martin. It has been such a loved show.

I haven't actually watched the final episode because I can't honestly bear to watch it. I decided I have to find the right moment to do that because I am going to be really sad. I got so many texts and emails and phone calls from people who

were really moved by it, and thought it was a really beautiful ending.

Do you remember your final scene?

My final scene was with Eileen Atkins, in the kitchen of the Doc and Louisa's house for the final episode. Eileen and I got there a bit early before we started rehearsing the scene, and Nigel Cole the director, put music on in the studio for us. So Eileen and I had a little dance in the kitchen to the Rolling Stones. That was probably the highlight of the series - having a kitchen disco with Eileen. Eileen has definitely got some amazing moves. We did have a laugh. Then I did the scene, burst into tears and left, and got a plane to Prague.

What was it like filming the final scenes and saying goodbye to the cast, crew and Port Isaac?

It was terrible getting in the car to finally leave. I finished the scene, and Martin bought me a really beautiful present and wrote me a lovely card. I went to say goodbye, burst into tears and said 'I don't want to go'.

I also had to say goodbye to little Elliott who plays James and that was a heartbreaker. He was so sweet, he was worried about saying goodbye to everyone as well. I gave him a little gift and we said our goodbyes and he was adorable. He was bought a bike by the production. My last memory when I was driving away was was waving at Elliott, but by then he was so ensconced in his new bike all the sadness was gone and he was very happy.

It is ridiculous how good Elliott is. He is such a wise little guy and was always making us laugh our heads off, which was a bit of a problem some times. Sometimes we would be in the middle of a scene and he would say 'sorry, can I just say something' and he would come out with a little musing. He is a very special little kid. I am sure he has a career in acting ahead of him. He has such a winning approach.

We all had a lovely barbecue and party on the beach on the Friday evening before we finished filming. Jessica Ransom (who plays Morwenna) and I went for a swim at Port Gaverne before the party. Our families were there. It is such a special place.

Did you take home a souvenir from the production and/or Port Isaac to remind you of the 18 years you have been working on Doc Martin?

I was very lucky I got a very beautiful painting which had been on the wall outside Martin and Louisa's bedroom. The painting, by a local artist, was of all the roof tops of Port Isaac, from the harbour wall. The art department said it was the first painting they bought in an art gallery in Wadebridge when the series started in 2004.

I love it, and it now sits in my house and makes me happy every day.

I came away with a couple of Louisa's dresses and a couple of really nice knitted tops made by a company called O'Pioneers. The knitters who made the tops had a WhatsApp group, and they told me they would message each other when they spotted Louisa wearing one of their knits.

You filmed the Christmas special in February, before starting filming the final series, what was it like seeing Port Isaac dressed for Christmas?

To be there in February, and to make February look like Christmas when we had all just packed away our own Christmas decorations was quite strange. It was beautiful to see it all lit up with Christmas decorations every where. I guess it was a bit puzzling for the tourists because suddenly there were Christmas decorations hanging from all the lamp posts and the shop windows were dressed.

The weather was challenging - there was a major storm Eunice— how did that affect filming?

We were filming in a studio in a barn and we were safe in there, but there were all sorts of things flying around outside.

I got a call from my mum who had seen the news about the storm hitting Cornwall, and asking me if I was OK. I went back to the back of the studio to talk to her and I was telling her we were all OK, and we were being well looked after when one of the sparks shouted over to me to say my hair was on fire. I was standing by a light trying to keep warm, and my pony tail was up against this massive light and there was smoke coming from it. I had no idea. My mum heard this and I had to reassure her.

What happens in the Christmas episode?

We have a very disappointed James on our hands because he didn't get to meet Santa, and a very indignant Doc Martin, and it is baby Mary's first Christmas.

Louisa doesn't want James to be disappointed and when she tells him about the lantern parade in Portwenn when she was a child he asks her to organise one

even though it is Christmas Eve the following day. He is so persuasive Louisa decides she will try to organise a parade. But unfortunately in true Doc Martin style, there are many complicated events that happen to hinder this happening in a smooth way.

James is really upset when he sees his dad having an argument with Santa and he runs away. Louisa and Martin are absolutely distraught until they get a call from Ruth to say James is safe with her.

Louisa is terrified something awful has happened to Martin when he doesn't return to the village after treating a patient. There is this constant peril and tension all the way through the episode, whether or not they will be reunited, will Christmas ever happen.

It is a very beautiful Christmassy episode in this lovely snowy backdrop of Port Isaac, in a way you've never seen it before. It is a really lovely way to close the book on the story. It is another ending, but a very final and very beautiful one and funny too. There's always a twist at the end, never straight forward, and quite apocalyptic.

What are your own favourite Christmas memories?

Decorating the Christmas tree with our kids has been a lovely thing as a parent. I definitely identified with Louisa's enjoyment of getting a Christmas tree.

Our Christmas tree does look overly done, certainly not a tasteful Christmas tree. I just throw everything at it.

What is your favourite Christmas present?

My husband and I give ourselves the gift of no Christmas presents to each other which takes the pressure off us so we can focus on kids and family members and not get in a tizzy about what to get each other.

You have been away from home filming for much of this year, you must be looking forward to spending time at home with your family? Do you have any plans?

It's been a brilliant, exciting, nourishing year full of really great work, so I am very happy to be back at home in London with the family. We are staying home for Christmas, and really looking forward to that.

You have done the voice over for the documentary Farewell to Doc Martin, which will follow the transmission of the Christmas special.

It is a lovely way to say goodbye to Doc Martin.

You started work on a new project soon after finishing filming Doc Martin?

I flew to Prague to film A Small Light, which is an eight part Disney series, following the story of Miep Gies, a Dutch woman who risked her life to shelter Anne Frank's family from the Nazis for more than two years during World War 11.

What is next?

A Buffalo Pictures production about Barbara Hulanicki who founded the Biba store.

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