

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Portuguese Christmas



Father Christmas is believed to bring presents to children on Christmas Eve, rather than Christmas Day. The presents are left under the Christmas tree or in shoes by the fireplace. On Christmas Day the living room table remains untouched and people still enjoy their goodies together! Families come together and have Christmas Day lunch together. After the meal, people go to church for the 'Missa do Galo' or 'Mass of the Rooster' service. After the service people return home, and open their presents. Every house has a rich table set in the living room full with traditional food, cakes, fried cookies, nuts and other goodies!



The traditional Christmas cake is 'Bolo Rei' (which means 'King Cake') and is placed in the center of the table. People drink Porto wine, traditional liquors and eat 'azevias' and 'felhozes' (Portuguese biscuits and sweets). The party lasts until the early hours of the morning

French Christmas



Nearly every French home at Christmastime displays a Nativity scene or *crèche*, which serves as the focus for the Christmas celebration. The *crèche* is often peopled with little clay figures called *santons* or "little saints." An extensive tradition has evolved around these little figures which are made by craftsmen in the south of France throughout the year.

The Christmas tree has never been particularly popular in France, and though the use of the Yule log has faded, the French make a traditional Yule log-shaped cake called the *bouche de Noël*, which means "Christmas Log." The cake, among other food in great abundance, is served at the grand feast of the season, which is called *le réveillon*. French children receive gifts from *Père Noël* who travels with his stern disciplinarian companion *Père Fouettard*. In some parts of France *Père Noël* brings small gifts on St. Nicholas Eve (December 6) and visits again on Christmas. In other places it is *le petit Jésus* who brings the gifts

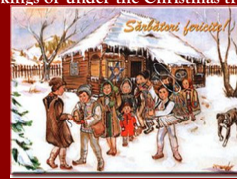


Merry Christmas



Romanian Christmas

For Romanian people, Christmas is one of the most important holidays, if not the most important one and to celebrate a Romanian style Christmas you need to observe the festival in its full traditional mode. During the 40 days before this holiday Romanian Christians respect the Advent. Do not eat meat or dairy products in preparation for Christmas. Romanian folklores are full of Christmas carols which are not just simple songs but prayers in verse. The way to celebrate Romanian Christmas is to allow the influence of its rich culture to affect your celebration. Christmas carols are one of the best-known winter traditions in Romania. So, in true Romanian fashion, on Christmas eve, go from house to house, wishing health, happiness and fortune to the householders. Decorate the Christmas tree in the presence of all family members. Remember that sometime during the night, Santa will slide through the chimney and leave gifts for everybody in stockings or under the Christmas tree.



Polish Christmas

Beautifully lit Christmas trees are placed in all public arenas, outside churches and in homes. Traditionally the trees are decorated with shiny apples, walnuts, beautifully wrapped chocolate shapes and many homemade decorations and candles. On the top of the tree is a star or a glittering top piece. In many homes, sparklers are hung on the branches of the trees giving it a magical air. Sometimes the trees are left standing until February 2, the feast day of St. Mary of the Candle of Lightning. On Christmas Eve, so important is the first star of the night that it has been given the affectionate name of "little star" or Gwiazdka, in remembrance of the Star of Bethlehem. On that night, all people watch the sky anxiously, hoping to be the first to cry out, "The star!" The moment the star appears, people start eating.



Finnish Christmas



Christmas is probably the Finns' most important festive period, regarded widely as a family event. Christmas in Finland is celebrated over three days, with the main festivities taking place on Christmas Eve (December 24), when Finns eat Christmas dinner and gifts are distributed. Christmas Day is a time of family peace and quiet, while on Boxing Day people visit friends.

The pre-Christmas celebrations of Swedish-speaking Finns culminate in the Lucia festival, which has its origins in Sweden. Lucia day is celebrated on December 13 when the Lucia maiden, selected these days by Finland's main Swedish-language newspaper, Hufvudstadsbladet, makes her appearance at the head of a procession on the steps of Helsinki's Lutheran Cathedral.

