



CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AND GASTRONOMY

PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Starting about three weeks before Christmas, families place moistened wheat in saucers. This makes a pretty decoration, which is placed by the Baby Jesus' figurine.





“Altar do Menino Jesus” used in Madeira Island and the Azores

PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Families might also build nativity scenes out of natural materials. Little houses and animals are made out of clay, and, for scenery, lots of moss, and foliage. Children of all ages participate in gathering the moss and help out. A nativity scene can also be built in church, which will come particularly alive at Midnight Mass.



“Presépio”



“Presépio”

PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The Nativity scene (called “Presépio”), with Mary, Joseph, the cow and the donkey, the Three Wise Men, and lots of other figures. The figure of the Christ Child is added to the scene after the family attends Midnight Mass.



PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The children receive the presents at midnight of 24/25 December or early in 25th December morning. They put their shoes near the fireplace and hope to find their shoes packed with gifts and treats in the morning. The treats left are more likely to be candied fruits and sweet breads. The children believe in Santa Claus (called "Pai Natal" - which means: Father Christmas) and the parents tell them that is the baby Jesus who helps Santa with the presents.

PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

The “Consoada” (a meal eaten on Christmas Eve) is the reunion of the family, until they wait for the coming of Father Christmas. There are families who reserve an empty place for the persons who died, but it doesn't happen very often. This originates from the practice of leaving seed offerings for relatives in the hope that they will provide a bountiful harvest.

PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

The most typical dishes during the “Consoada” are boiled codfish and Portuguese sprouts (in pure olive oil normally) and then everybody puts lots of desserts in the table and typical plates (rice pudding with cinnamon, "rabanadas"- seems like French toast, "filhoses"- fried desserts, "broas de mel" - pastries made with honey, “Sonhos” - pumpkin fritters).



Codfish



“Rabanada”

“Sonhos”



PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY



“Broas de mel”



“Filhoses”



“Arroz doce”

PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

Another very traditional dessert is the "Bolo Rei" (King's cake) which is a very rich fruit cake laced with crystallized fruits and pine nuts. There is a little present inside the cake and a broad bean - who finds the broad bean in one slice, must pay the next "King Cake".



PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

It represents the star the wise men followed to Jesus. The legend goes as follows: close to the place where Baby Jesus was the Three Wise Men had an argument – who would first offer their gifts? The solution was given by a baker: he would bake a cake with a broad bean inside. The first to find the bean in the slice of cake would be the first to offer the gifts. The shape of the cake is similar to the shape of a crown, the crystallized fruit, the almonds, walnuts and figs remember the jewels. This cake symbolises the gifts that the Three Wise Kings gave to Baby Jesus. The crust of the cake represents the gold, the dried fruit symbolises myrrh and its smell incense.



PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Midnight mass, or "Missa de Galo" (The Roosters Mass), is still a large event for religious citizens. Catholics participate in the Midnight Mass because the cock announces the new day and therefore the day of Christmas. The celebration takes place very late because many of the events in the life of Jesus happened in dawn: His birth and His resurrection. The cock represents the end of darkness and the beginning of a new day. In some villages of Portugal, a cock was taken to mass and if he sang it would mean great crops that year.

PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

In the regions of *Bragança*, *Guarda* or *Castelo Branco*, a Yule log is burned in the atrium of the village church after mass. It helps keep everyone warm through the night and to wish family and friends a Merry Christmas.

PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

During Christmas day, Portuguese people visit friends and family and have a big lunch normally with roast chicken, lamb or turkey.



PORTUGAL

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Festivities go on until January 6th – called “Dia de Reis”, also known as “Epiphany Sunday”, “Three Kings Day” or “Twelfth Day”. Some families give children their main gifts on this day. Until the Three Kings Day, there are parties, gift giving and masses.



PORTUGAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

A long time ago in the Azores, people would make home-made liqueurs during the Christmas season and invite friends to go to their homes to taste the liqueurs, Christmas cakes or other sweets. Since these drinks were made in honour of Baby Jesus, whenever they were poured into a glass it was referred to as the Baby Jesus urinating or "O Menino Mija" in Portuguese.



PORTUGAL

NEW YEAR CUSTOMS

On New Year celebrations, at midnight, there's a fireworks display in every town. Everyone eats 12 raisins, with one wish for each month, and drinks champagne to bring in the New Year. At the start of the New Year, people sing in the streets. These are the "Janeiras" (New Year's carollers). People sing traditional songs and those who pass by are wished a Happy New Year full of luck.



“Janeiras”

“Fogo de artifício”



ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Christmas, as it is celebrated in Italy, has two origins: the familiar traditions of Christianity blended with the pagan traditions predating the Christmas era. The greatest feast of the ancient Roman Empire, "Saturnalia" (a winter solstice celebration), just happens to coincide with the Christmas celebrations of the Advent.

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

A disappearing tradition in Italy is the ushering in of the coming festivities by the "Piferari" or fifers. They descend from the mountains of the Abruzzo and Latium playing inviting and characteristic tunes on their bagpipes, filling the air with anticipation for the joyous celebration to come.



ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

During the holiday season, the shepherds play musical instruments and sing Christmas songs in the villages. Children collect in groups dress up as shepherds, play pipes and recite Christmas poems and sing Christmas songs door to door. In return, they receive money to buy presents.

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Nativity Scenes are very popular and can be seen displayed in almost every Christian household. In fact the tradition of having Nativity Scenes began in Italy first and traces its origins back to St. Francis of Assisi and Giovanni Vellita, a work-man from the village of Greccio. Apparently St. Francis came up with the idea of performing mass before a recreated version of the Nativity Scene and asked the above mentioned Giovanni Vellita to construct a scaled down model for him.



“Presepio”

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The nativity scenes are arranged on a wooden pyramidal setting, sometimes several feet high that is known as a Ceppo. At the top is the manger scene or 'Presepio' as it is called in Italy, in which you will often come across some very skilfully hand-carved and carefully detailed human and animal figures. On the shelves of the ceppo below packaged gifts and sweets are usually displayed.



“Ceppo”

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Aside from the Presepio - and usually next to it - each family also usually displays a large vessel or bowl that is dubbed as the Urn of Fate and is filled with presents.

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Another tradition is the burning of the Yule log, which must stay alight until New Year's Day. This, again, is an example of pagan and Christian blending. The pagan belief explains the purifying and revitalizing power of fire, and that with the burning log, the old year and its evils are destroyed. Christian legend tells how the Virgin Mary enters the homes of the humble at midnight while the people are away at Midnight Mass and warms her newborn child before the blazing log.



ITALY

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

Christmas Eve dinner consists largely of fish. There are maybe as many as 10 to 20 fish dishes prepared. In Rome, the traditional dish of Christmas Eve is "Capitone," a big female eel, roasted, baked or fried. North of Rome a traditional dish may be pork, sausage packed in a pig's leg, smothered in lentils, or turkey stuffed with chestnuts.

ITALY

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

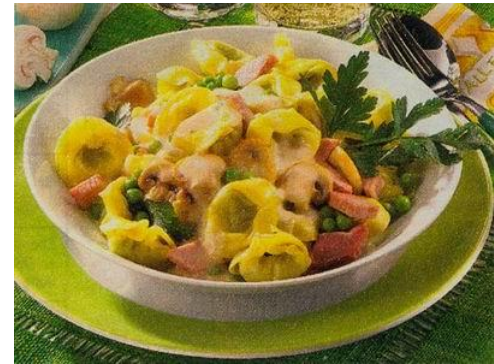
Other dishes that are traditionally served at this feast include Spaghetti, Anchovies, Amaretti (a baked sweet dish made up of eggs and almonds), Tortellini, Panettone (cake filled with candied fruit), Torrone (nougat) and Panforte (gingerbread) made with hazelnuts, honey and almonds and different types of chocolates.



Turkey stuffed with chestnuts



“Capitone”



“Tortellini”



“Panettone”



“Amaretti”



“Panforte”



“Torrone”

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The main exchange of Christmas gifts in Italy takes place on the Feast of the Epiphany. This event takes place on 6th January and it is on the night preceding day that Italian children hang up their stockings in anticipation of gifts. The bringer of gifts is a female character known as Befana.



ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

According to Italian legend, Befana lived on the route the Three Magi took when they set out to visit the Infant Jesus. They stopped at her house to ask her for directions to Bethlehem as well as for food and shelter. However Befana wasn't in a very sociable mood just then and told them to be off. Later, like most people, she had a change of heart and decided she wouldn't mind entertaining a few guests after all. But by then the guests were far beyond recall. Befana decided to go after them in any case and set off for Bethlehem.

ITALY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Like the Three Wise Men she followed the Star in the Sky, but unlike them she was unable to find the stable where the Christ Child lay. Befana however wasn't the sort to give up and is still flying around looking through windows and down chimney tops. She visits every house where there are children and leaves gifts just in case one of them happens to be the Christ Child. For the naughty children it is said she only leaves coals.



NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Christmas is filled with traditions, rituals and customs based in part on a number of old superstitions that continue today. In ancient times, Christmas was a mid-winter sacrificial feast - a festival of lights marking the transition from the dark winter to spring and summer. Christmas was a time for celebrating the harvest, fertility, birth and death. In the 900s King Haakon I decided that the heathen custom of drinking Jul (Yule) was to be moved to December 25th, in honour of the birth of Jesus Christ.

NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

In the past, barn doors were marked with a cross to keep evil spirits away. The cross was also used as a decoration on bread, as a pattern in the butter or on the ceiling over the Christmas table. All the people living on the farm - servants, family and guests - ate Christmas dinner together. Often the food stayed out till the next day in case spirits and little people should visit the farm during the night. The nisse could not be forgotten, otherwise ill fortune could befall the farm.



Nisse in barn eating Porridge

NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The most characteristic features of the Norwegian Santa Claus "Julenisse" are his red stocking cap and long white beard. The nisse wears knee breeches, hand-knitted stockings, a Norwegian sweater and a homespun jacket. On top he wears a heavy fur coat - it can get cold in Norway in the winter. He is jolly and happy, but can also be stern.



NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

According to old superstition, the nisse was the original settler of the land. His primary duty was to protect the land and buildings. He kept the farm in good order and would be helpful as long as he got his Christmas porridge or Christmas beer and lefse on Christmas Eve. Many farms would make up a bed for the nisse on Christmas Eve and the honorary place at the table stood ready and waiting for him. He comes to the house with a sack of presents on Christmas Eve. When the Christmas porridge is put out in the barn on Christmas Eve, it is gone the next morning.

Porridge



NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

December 13th is celebrated in honour of Saint Lucy, the young girl who according to legend died a martyr in Sicily. In Norway, this night used to be called Lussinatten. It was the longest night of the year and no work was to be done. From that night until Christmas, spirits, gnomes and trolls roamed the earth. Lussi, a feared enchantress, punished anyone who dared work. Legend also has it that farm animals talked to each other on Lussinatten, and that they were given additional feed on this longest night of the year.



Procession led by a young Lucia

NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

During the midwinter feast in Norway, evergreen branches, mistletoe and holly were used long before the Christmas tree became a tradition. Today the Christmas tree has a central place in the celebration of Christmas in Norway. The tree, a spruce or pine, must be fresh and green and fragrant, with a good shape and thick branches. Outdoor Christmas trees put up on squares, in parks and other places where people walk are lit the first Sunday in Advent, but the tree in the home is not lit until Christmas Eve.

NORWAY

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Christmas is a festival of lights and candle-making was one of the annual and necessary steps in the preparations for Christmas. The job was often turned over to the oldest people on the farm. The way the candles burned on Christmas night presaged what would happen in the coming year. If a light went out, it meant death for the person to whom the candle belonged.



NORWAY

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

At 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve all the churches begin to ring in Christmas. After church, the family gathers for a holiday meal. Food traditions vary, but a porridge meal with an almond hidden in someone's bowl is on most menus. Before the family sits down to dinner a bowl of porridge with butter, sugar and cinnamon has to be put out for the nisse.

NORWAY

CHRISTMAS GASTRONOMY

Christmas food traditions vary from district to district. In the coastal districts and in North Norway, the traditional Christmas dinner naturally consists of lutefisk, cod or halibut. In Eastern Norway pork ribs, pork patties, Christmas sausage and spiced cabbage are served. Western Norway supplies Norway with mutton. Desserts range from cloudberry cream, crème caramel and creamed rice to fruit.



Lutefisk



Pinnekjott



Pork ribs

Pork patties



Christmas sausage



“Lefse”



Yule log cake



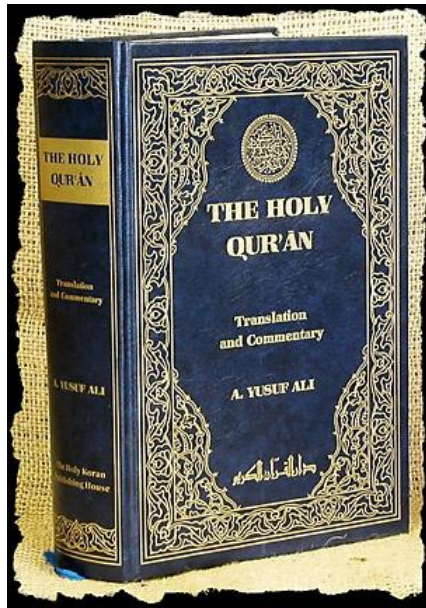
Cloudberry cream



“Krumkake”

TURKEY

In Turkey the majority of people are Muslim, who do not commemorate the birth of Jesus on December. Although their sacred book (the Koran) mentions Jesus, the most important figure is the Prophet Mahomet.



TURKEY

NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

At year's end, most Turkish cities will be decorated all over with lights. Shops throughout the country decorate their windows with green trees, white snowballs and red stockings and many other traditional Christmas ornaments. New Year's Eve is celebrated on December 31 together with friends and family. Many clubs, cafés and bars often have special New Year's Eve programs with shows and events.



Christmas decoration in a mall in Istanbul



Christmas in Istanbul

TURKEY

NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

Common superstitions

To ensure, for instance, that the New Year is prosperous and peaceful, you may unlock your door at midnight and sprinkle salt at the entrance of your house. Salt symbolizes abundance or wealth in many cultures.

... And then there's the lottery!

The national lottery (Milli Piyango) becomes more popular at the end of the year. Draws are on every 9th, 19th and 29th day of the month. There are three different ticket prices, full (tam), half (yarım) and quarter (çeyrek), which you can get from street vendors as well as at lunch counters and news-stands.

TURKEY

NEW YEAR GASTRONOMY

Some of the dishes for dinner that are organised with family and friends are *pilaf dish*, *dolma*, hot *borek*, *Lacum Rahat* (a candy), *baklava* and various other eggplant dishes, topped with warm pita, *salep* and *boza*.

Asure (also known as ashura, ashure, Noah's Dessert, or Noah's Pudding) is a regular Christmas tradition in some Turkish-American households. Tradition holds that asure is the meal Noah made from all the stored fruits and grains on the Ark after the Great Flood subsided. The multitude of ingredients symbolises gratitude and sharing of life's bounty.



“Baklava”



“Dolma”



“Lacum Rahat”



“Borek”



“Pilaf”



“Asure”

Merry Christmas

“Feliz Natal”

“Buon Natale“

“Lystig Jul” “God Jul“

“Noeliniz Kutlu Olsun”