

Christmas holidays in Italy

Christmas is one of the most important festivals celebrated all over the world. There is a large amount of traditions related to it in many countries. In Italy where they call it “Natale”, they consider it as a family holiday, a time to stay at home and celebrate. Although there are lots of customs about it, here are the most common and popular ones around the Italian cities.

Firstly, Italians kick off the Christmas season and start decorating, their houses and streets, on December 8. They set up huge trees, filled with colourful ornaments, in front of important buildings and sights which put everyone in the holiday spirit.

Along with the lights, the ribbons and the wreaths, loads of nativity scenes called “presepi”, are displayed in most of the churches and squares. They are usually crafted by hand in the most detailed way possible. In cities like Naples, people can find a whole street full of markets side by side in which local residents make and sell them.

When the Christmas Eve finally arrives, people host large dinners with their families. To prepare and purify their bodies for the next day, this tradition instructs them to not eat meat in any kind of way. Usually they serve many courses of sea food and vegetables.

Christmas day is when the big present opening takes place. Family members exchange gifts under the Christmas tree and then continue to celebrate by having lunch all together for hours. Their most common dishes are pasta, meat, sides and desserts. “Pandoro” and “Panettone” are the most popular sweets and are being sold in many countries that time of the year.

After 6 days, in New Year’s Eve Italians host another big dinner. They eat different kinds of food, like lentils (they are considered lucky), fish and risotto. When everyone has stopped eating, many start playing games. One that is familiar to most families there is called “Tombola”, the Italian Bingo, where everyone assigns a money prize in each round and plays until 1am. At midnight, when the year changes, they sometimes go to their balconies or roofs together and watch the fireworks.

Lastly, on Epiphany Eve, the night of January 5, in a similar way to Santa Claus, kids get a sock full of candies and little gifts from an old woman named Befana. She is portrayed as a witch riding a broomstick through the air, wearing a black shawl and is covered in soot because the legend says she enters in the houses through the chimney. All the celebrations typically the day after, on January 6.



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