

Traditional Christmas: Romanian Style

Christmas in Romania is a different kind of [Christmas](#), and that's because of the fact that tradition still plays a key role in it. Ancient customs, that have been passed down generation after generation still come to life every year, in the cold winter, during the period of the winter holidays- which in Romania starts around the 20th of December and ends on January 7th, when Romanians celebrate Saint John the Baptist. Surely enough, the effect of globalisation is obvious as well, as Romanians have adopted customs which are respected around the globe, like decorating the [Christmas tree](#) or giving gifts.

Food is very important in Romania when it comes to a traditional Christmas. Women around the country work ceaselessly in order to make sure that the Christmas meal is bountiful, as the whole family gathers for the first meal with meat after the Christmas fastening. A traditional Romanian Christmas meal consists of “sarmale” which are a mixture of meat, rice and spices wrapped up in cabbage, “piftie” which is pork meat in aspic, Boeuf salad- a mix of veggies such as potatoes, carrots, celery and peas with chicken and mayonnaise, eggplant salad, traditional sausages and “ciorbă de perișoare” a sour soup with pork meat dumplings. The favored dessert is called “cozonac” and it's similar to the Italian panettone. Everything is topped off with the country's signature alcoholic drink- “palinca” and wine.



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- Sour soup with meat balls-supă de perișoare



Pork jelly

Ingredients

- 4 [pork](#) feet
- 2 [pork](#) ears
- 1 small [pork](#) trotters[shopping list](#)
- 500 g [pork](#) rind
- 1 [pork tenderloin](#)
- 1 [carrot](#)
- 3 root [parsley](#)
- 2 whole [garlic](#)
- 1 tablespoon [pepper corn](#)

[salt](#)

How to make it

- Clean and wash meat products and vegetables. Place trotters, rind, ears, feet in a pot of cold water and let it cook. When it is boiling remove the white foam and add veggies and seasoning and cook for 1 hour. After add tenderloin and cook for another 3 hours, but do not cover it

anymore. At the end remove the fat swimming on top.

- Separate meat from the broth. Remove all bones and gristle from the meat. Break the meat and skin into chunks, and divide into individual bowls. Fill the bowls to cover the meat. Then allow the whole mixture to cool over night.



Another important aspect of Christmas in Romania is the tradition of caroling. Children go from door to door on Christmas Eve, singing traditional Romanian carols. They receive in exchange of their performance apples, nuts, sweets and sometimes money.



Adults also go caroling, the night of December 24th and every day until the last day of Christmas. They don't receive tokens as the children, but they are properly served with food and drinks. In some part of the country, rituals are performed in order to keep the "bad spirits" away. Men dress up as ghastly beings and sing and dance.

Christmas in Romania is all about family: gathering round the table, eating, singing carols and spending quality time with each other. Carolers are always welcome, the food is plenty and joy is the air. What's your favorite thing about Christmas?

Special Christmas traditions in Romania



Christmas is the most important religious celebration in Romania and many centuries-old traditions are still alive, especially in the northern region of Satu Mare and Maramures

Attending the Christmas mass in traditional clothes in a wooden church

On Christmas day, villagers put on their colorful, hand-made traditional clothes and attend the Christmas mass.

Maramures is famous for its **wooden churches** and many villages have one and is used for this occasion. The image of people wearing traditional clothes inside a wooden church is very powerful and brings you back in time centuries ago. It also tells a lot about the **spirituality** and **deeper connection** these people have with their **heritage** and **nature**.

Caroling



Caroling is usually associated with Christmas but its origins are rather connected to the **winter solstice** and the passing into a new year. So in Romania caroling takes place throughout December and into the first days of January.

On the **Christmas Eve** it is both children and adults which sing carols, visiting all the houses in the village. Some carols refer to the **birth of Jesus** but many of them carry messages about **regeneration, abundance, fertility, warding off evil spirits**.

A carol with a religious connotation is **The Star (Steaua)**, happening on Christmas Eve. Usually, a group of 4 boys carry a star made of wood, decorated with colored paper and a light singing about the night when The Three Wise Men following the big star arrived to the place where Jesus was born bringing presents.

The **"Play of the Old Men" (Jocul Moșilor)** on the other hand is a carol played by men wearing masks and dancing, having pagan roots. The one wearing the mask has the possibility to transcend



and take over the

special powers of the mask and at the same time allow him to have an unnatural behavior. A similar carol is called **Brondosii** whereby men wear masks and bells and go through the village

trying to ward off the evil spirits.

There are many other interesting carols such as Viflaim (religious theater), the Goat, the Bear, the Plough (Plugusorul) which are still performed in Maramures.

The carolers usually receive a **round pretzel** (symbol of the Sun), **apples** (the fruit of knowledge) and **nuts** (associated with the World Egg).

Traditional Christmas dinner

The traditional food for Christmas in our area is forcemeat rolls in cabbage (**sarmale**), different kinds of pork **sausages**, sponge cakes, home-made cakes and for drinks **palinca** (plum or apple brandy).



You can notice that pork meat is the main ingredient and there is a reason for that. Local families usually raise a pig throughout the year which they slaughter in the weeks before Christmas and then prepare meat products from it like sausage, lard, bacon, dry-cured ham. This is a centuries-old tradition, from the times when animals were sacrificed and offered to God. The time for this sacrifice was just before the Winter Solstice, on December 20th (St Ignatius Day), a date which is still considered the right time for the slaughtering. Tradition says that one should not feel sorry

Romanian Christmas food



on Christmas every Romanian family has on their table sarmale, caltabosi, carnati and toba. Below you'll find short explanations of these words (and many others) and in the future their recipes. All of them being part of the traditional Christmas food in Romania.

Romanian Christmas food generally uses pork. Everything swine has inside is used. Some of them are used for Christmas holidays, others are prepared to be eaten later, till in spring.



Christmas food - appetizers

- carnati - home made sausages
- caltabosi - sausages made from heart, liver, lung and meat of the head
- jumari - melted fat
- piftie - pork feet jelly (or aspic?)
- toba - I found somewhere the name head cheese (?)
- smoked ham - no comment this time

Christmas food - soups

- peasant soup with smoked pork meat
- sour soup with meat balls

Christmas food - main dish

- sarmale - cabbage rolls with pork
- baked gammon
- baked pork chops
- breaded pork chops
- baked pork backhead
- pork schnitzel
- meatballs
- pork's alms
- grilled carp
- vegetable hodgepodge

Christmas food - dessert

- [sweet bred \(cozonac\)](#)
- knot-shaped Christmas bread (colaci de Craciun)

- lots of cookies
- lots of layered cakes
- apple pie in advent time
- baked apples and many others

Christmas food - others

- [mamaliga](#) - if names like polenta, maize porridge
- balmos - a special food from mamaliga

