

# Customs and traditions of Christmas and New Year in Transylvania

## Brief History

The Romanian culture is very rich in tradition and folklore. The culture steams from the Dacians, who once occupied the area in the past, among other influences are the Romans. Festivals feature brightly ornamented costumes with traditional dancing. Wood carvings, skilfully woven carpets, and pottery are some of the elements of traditional Romanian culture.

## Christmas traditions in Transylvania

In Transylvania, Christmas and mid-winter celebrations last from 20th December to 7th January. The 20th is when people celebrate St. Ignatius's Day. It is traditional that if the family keep pigs, one is killed on this day. The meat from the pig is used in the Christmas meals. The Christmas celebrations really begin on Christmas Eve, 24th, when it's time to decorate the Christmas Tree. This is done in the evening of Christmas Eve.



Carol singing is also a very popular part of Christmas in Transylvania. On Christmas Eve, children go out carol singing from house to house performing to the adults in the houses proclaiming the Savior. Adults go carol singing on Christmas Day evening and night.

A traditional Romanian Carol is the 'Star Carol'. The star, made of colored paper and often decorated with tinsel, silver foil and

sometimes bells, is put on a pole. In the middle of the star is a picture of baby Jesus or a nativity scene. Carol singers take the star with them when they go carol singing.

## Christmas food in Transylvania

Traditional Romanian Christmas foods include Roast Gammon and Pork Chops , which is a slightly sour vegetable soup made with fermented bran and pork meatballs; cabbage leaves stuffed with ground pork and served with polenta; 'Cozonac' a rich fruit bread; Romanian doughnuts and cheesecakes.

During Christmastime, Romanians bake or buy various special dishes, including desserts and sweets. Romanians most usually bake sponge cake, a kind of Panetone made of flour, yolks, yeast and many other ingredients, flavors, condiments and additions. There are several types of sponge cake, with hundreds of recipes. You can either knead it for hours to be out in 6 hours, or you can let it crease for 12 hours to avoid kneading it. You can fill the sponge cake with walnuts, cocoa, raisins, poppy seeds, or Turkish delights.

#### New Year's Traditions and Customs

Romanians make such a big deal of New Year's Eve. Most Romanians believe that we need to do a major cleaning before this day, outside and inside our homes because whatever or whoever you are on the last day of the year is how you are going to be the next year. So if the New Year catches you with a messy and dirty home this is how your home will be for the entire next year and so on... This superstition doesn't just work for cleaning, but also the way you manage your money. The belief is that if you have no money on the last day of the year, then you will probably have no money all year next year so on New Year's Eve everybody is stuffing their pockets with money to ensure a prosperous new year. We basically try to follow the saying, "Do not let the year find you... because this is how your next year will be!"

It all starts in the morning of the New Year's Eve when groups of children go from house to house performing "The little plow". Equipped with bells and even whips, the children recite or sing traditional lyrics, the main message being in all cases health wishes for the hosts and rich crops for the year to come. In the evening of the same day, groups of adults, dressed in traditional clothes and playing musical instruments, perform "The big plow", even bringing a plow with horses or bulls in more traditional villages.

One of my favorite things on New Year's Eve is the food and the cooking that is going on that day. A few traditional foods we usually cook are Sauerkraut Cabbage Rolls, Romanian Jellied



Pig's Feet, Eggplant Salad and many more. Oh... another superstition we have is that you should not eat chicken or any type of bird on New Year's because it has wings and therefore your luck will fly away....

**The essay was made by the student Chira Andrei**