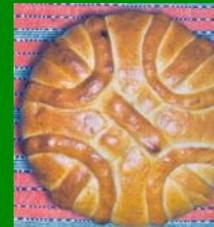
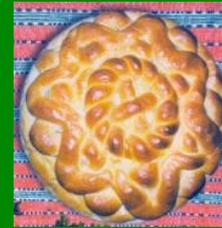


Christmas Traditions



in Bulgaria

Christmas is the most important family feast of the year.

On Christmas eve even our teenage brothers and sisters remain at home, celebrating with all the family.



On great holydays as Christmas and Easter, most families like to go to church to watch the ceremony, which is very solemn and beautiful and the chorus is so wonderful.

At home the whole family usually prepares all the traditional Bulgarian Christmas meals, which are the same for each family, but may differ in number.

The meals should always be an odd number, and with no meat. /More about the traditional foods for Christmas down at the end/

We prepare 7, 9, or 11 traditional Christmas meals / on the table there should always be an odd number of meals and treats /. All of them are vegetarian as it is the last night of fasting.

Normally we have cooked beans, a meal from rice and spices wrapped in cabbage, or vines leaves, different kinds of salads, cheese, and most important the Christmas “pita”, or banitz: with a coin for luck in it. We often put more luck items in the banitzza, so that most of the people can get their chance.

We write little notes with good wishes which, wrapped in aluminium foil we put in the pita, or banitzza before baking.



We have a special compote from boiled dried fruits /plumps, apples, pears and apricots with lemon and spices. And lots of nuts, pop corn and fresh fruit. We also drink airan – a drink from the real Bulgarian yoghurt mixed with water and a bit of salt. Adults drink red wine. For a dessert we have fruits and a kind of pastry soaked in a very sweet syrup.



We have a very special tradition in Bulgaria, which comes from ancient times /before Christ/. It's connected to the Winter solstice and the belief that people should fight the evil forces of Nature /darkness, cold, frost, blizzards, drafts, infertility and all of the kind/. This ritual, called SURVAKANE is very important for the good health and overall prosperity of people and agriculture. SURVAKANE was traditionally performed by young boys and men, but nowadays it's a privilege for all children.



At first a special tree branch is decorated with all kinds of coloured threads, dry fruits, peppers and popcorn. The youngest of the family takes the Survachka, and beats with it at the backs of all family members, reciting special verses with good wishes for health, wealth and fertility. Then they repeat the ritual with the live stock, the trees and plants, in the yard and go outside to meet other youngsters with Survachka. In groups they visit the neighbourhood and for each beating and good wishes, they get special treats and coins.

The tradition is kept alive even in the biggest cities, where children usually perform Survakane only at home among the family members. They most often get not only coins, but lots of big banknotes too. And the survachka are so beautiful, that this tradition is likely to last forever.

