



Christmas traditions in Poland

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Like in most Central European countries, Christmas in Poland is a quaint and much-beloved affair. However, while Germanic traditions, like decorating trees, have spread so far as to be unsurprising, Polish customs remain delightfully distinctive.



Most of the Polish Christmas celebrations take place on 24th December, and even though the day isn't an official public holiday in Poland, to many Poles it is one of the most significant and family-oriented dates in the calendar. Many institutions stop working earlier than usual on the day of Christmas Eve, which is usually celebrated with a family dinner at home





Waiting for the first star to appear in the sky

Many Poles wait until the first star appears in the sky before sitting down to eat on 24th December. This tradition commemorates the Star of Bethlehem, which according to the New Testament guided the Wise Men to the birthplace of Christ.

Nowadays, with so many satellites circling around the Earth and reflecting light, it's sometimes tricky to adhere to this tradition, but many families do their best.

Sharing an *opłatek*



Opłatek is an unleavened wafer made of flour and water embossed with a religious image. Every person attending the Christmas celebration gets one and then shares pieces of it with everyone else. This is accompanied by exchanges of good wishes and occurs before sitting down to eat. This tradition is linked to the breaking of bread at the Last Supper.

Speaking with animals



According to an old Polish legend, animals are granted the gift of speech on Christmas Eve as a reward for their role in welcoming Jesus on earth. As a result, children often try to extract a word or two out of bewildered family pets.



The background of the slide is a wooden table decorated with various Christmas ornaments, including blue and silver spheres, pine branches, and silver pinecones. The text is centered on the table.

Leaving one empty place at the table

Once everybody sits down at the table to taste the delicious Christmas dishes you might notice that one place is still empty. Many Poles still leave an empty place set at the table in case a person down on luck should show up and ask for shelter. While this rarely happens nowadays, the tradition nevertheless requires that lone strangers be taken in and treated as family.

Not eating meat

Christmas in Poland is a pescatarian's dream. In strict keeping with old Catholic tradition, Poles usually abstain from meat and hard liquor on Christmas Eve. However, wine and fish are acceptable, and the latter is abundantly featured in traditional dishes. If you're worried about your Polish dinner manners, brush up with [this handy guide](#).



Putting hay beneath the tablecloth

If you find some hay beneath the tablecloth at a Polish Christmas Eve celebration, don't assume your hosts did a poor job of tidying up. The hay is there on purpose, as a way of remembering that, according to the Bible, the newborn Jesus was put in a manger to rest.



Preparing 12 dishes

A traditional Polish Christmas Eve dinner consists of 12 dishes. One for each month of the new year. Some claim that one should try every dish to secure good luck throughout the upcoming twelve-month period. Classic Polish Christmas dishes include, amongst others, cabbage and mushroom pierogi (dumplings) and the poppy seed cake known as makowiec.

The midnight mass – at midnight between the 24th and 25th of December, Midnight Mass takes place. Midnight Mass commemorates the expectation and prayer of shepherds on their way to Bethlehem. This is one of the most important Polish traditions.



Christmas quiz



How many reindeer drive Santa Claus' sleigh (counting Rudolph)?



Answer: Nine

**Which country was the first
to use the tradition of
Christmas trees?**

Answer: Germany



**Which company made the
concept of Santa Claus
popular worldwide?**

Answer: Coca-Cola



According to the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ was born
in a _____.



Answer: Stable

In the carol, “Jingle Bells,” what kind of a sleigh is mentioned?



“A one-horse open sleigh”

Where does Santa Claus live?

Answer: in Lapland



Merry Christmas!

