

Easter traditions in Greece



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Travelling to Greece around Easter time is a wonderful opportunity to see how Greeks celebrate this very important day and to experience the deep connection and respect they have for their tradition. For the Greek Orthodox Church, Easter is the most important day as it symbolizes the beginning of new life. If you are visiting Greece at this time of the year, you must not miss participating in a number of customs that are deeply cherished and respected among the locals.



Easter fasting

The week before Easter is also known as the Holy Week. During that week and 5 weeks before, people are fasting, which means that no meat, eggs or dairy products are included in their meals until Easter. After the Holy Saturday midnight liturgy, Christians break their fast and celebrate Easter with a meal together with their loved one, the “Magiritsa soup”.



The dying of eggs and preparing the “tsoureki”

On Holy Thursday women are boiling and dying eggs red and preparing the traditional easter sweet bread “tsoureki” which will be intact on the table until the Holy Saturday.



The epitaph

On Good Friday in all the Greek churches the Epitaph is ready to receive the body of Jesus.

At midday, young girls decorate the epitaph with spring flowers (violets, roses and noxes) and make wreaths or garlands, while they sing the Virgin Mary's Lady.

After the decoration of the epitaph, the faithful come to the churches to worship, and they pass underneath the epitaph not only "to grace them," but to declare allegiance, confession to Christ.

In many regions of Greece that day, a model of Judah is made which either burns or is shot and then burns. Also on the same day, many believers visit the graves of relatives and friends or, if the required time period has passed, the exhumation of the dead is carried out.



Afanos

Specifically, in Hortiatis we have a unique and very old custom known as "Afanos".

A lot of people, most of them teenagers, everyday during the Holy Week at a high point on the mountain of Hortiatis gather woods and put them on top of each other up to 5 meters, preparing something like a tree which represents the Judas Iscariot. After the midnight liturgy on Saturday night, once the priest says Christ the Risen, they fire the wood as a punishment for Judas's betrayal to Jesus. This great fire is seen from every point in the village.



The “tsougrisma” of eggs

The clinking of the red eggs, or “tsougrisma” in Greek, on the Holy Saturday, Easter Day and some days after, is a tradition to express love and reconciliation that sweetens human relationships during the holy days of Easter.

Traditionally, Easter eggs were dyed in red color, but nowadays you can see colorful egg baskets.



The roasting of the lamb on a spit

Lamb is the meat that is most traditionally served on Easter Sunday. Families gather very early in the morning at their yards to start a fire and roast the lamb on a spit along with “kokoretsi” (lamb organs on the skewer covered with offals), enjoying a long lunch, singing and dancing traditional greek dances.



“Botides” in Corfu [1/2]

In Greece, there are some places where they celebrate the Easter with their own special way. In Kerkyra (Corfu) on the Holy Saturday the locals wake up early in the morning, go outside their balconies and throw jugs filled with water, called “botides”, down on the road.



“Botides” in Corfu [2/2]

By throwing the jugs, the Corfiots like to drive away the evil, meaning also the end of winter dormancy and the regeneration of Nature.

When the bustle of the jugs ends, the Philharmonics are streaming on the streets playing joyous music.

A lot of tourists visit Corfu to enjoy the spectacle, which is called “Botides”.



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