

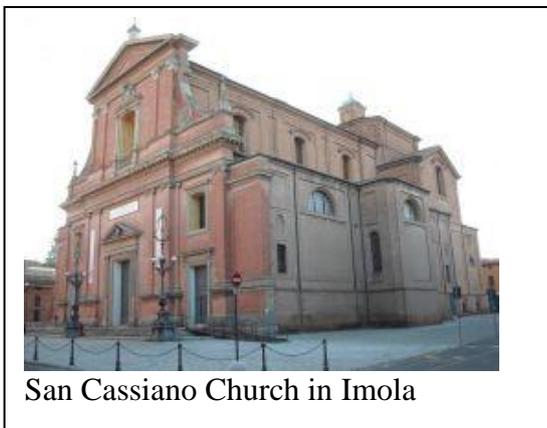
## Traditions in Italy

Italy is famous to be a place full of traditions that, put all together, form our country's special cultural identity.

### Holidays

A high percentage of Italians professed to be Catholic and they celebrate most Christian holidays, including Christmas and Easter. Pasquetta, on the Monday after Easter, usually involves family activities, such as picnics in parks, as it falls at the beginning of spring.

Other religious holidays are: November 1 Saints Day, 2<sup>nd</sup> November All souls day when Italians decorate the graves of their dead with flowers.



San Cassiano Church in Imola

In many towns and villages the feast day of the patron saint is celebrated. For instance, the day dedicated to the patron of Imola (our city) Saint Cassiano is 13th of August. On this day kids usually don't go to school because it is summer holidays, adults don't go to work and many shops close down for the occasion.

We also have to mention another important festivity: the celebration of

Epiphany (January 6), which is much like Christmas. According to the legend, la Befana, an old lady who flies on her broomstick, brings candies to good children and pieces of coal to the bad ones.

April 25 is the Liberation Day, in which Italians celebrate the official date of the liberation of Italy on the 25th April 1945 by the Americans and the allies at the end of World War II.

### Labor Day, May 1

May 1, the day of the worker, is another Italian national holiday with more festivals, parades, and special events. Since it's so close to Liberation Day, many Italians take a vacation from April 25 through May 1.

### Republic Day, June 2

Festa della Repubblica, June 2, commemorates the birth of the Italian Republic. Most major sites and attractions are open and it's another day when you may find concerts, parades, and other special events. In Rome there's usually a big parade presided over by Italy's president and military bands play music in the gardens of the Quirinale, open to the public.

### Christmas Day

But what about Christmas? Italians love it! Every one celebrate it in a



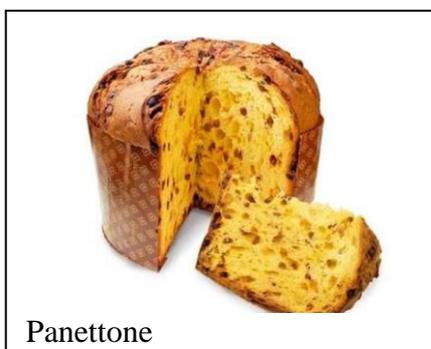
different way, but there are some elements that are more or less in every family.

Everyone in Italy experiences the **Cenone** (*great evening dinner*) every year. As the word says, it is a big dinner on the 24th December's evening usually passed with your family that is made up of many different dishes. The only exception regarding food is that no meat is eaten, but there are many other options. For example, in my family we eat *tagliatelle* (a variety of pasta) with cream and mushrooms, croquettes, dried fruits and *Panettone* or *Pandoro* (two similar and typical Christmas cake-kind dessert. Every family has at least one every year). The *Cenone* can last many hours because of the pauses between the many dishes and also because it is a very important moment to spend with your family. After it, several Italian families go to the night Mass, that usually starts at around midnight and lasts for one hour and a half or so. When it ends, people look for their friends and family to wish them a "Merry Christmas" and then everyone goes home.

On Christmas morning, children wake their parents up and they open their presents all together.

Usually people go to one of their relatives' house and they celebrate the day with the whole family. Christmas dinner is an important moment where all the family members meet, sometimes after a long time. Just as for the cenone, Christmas dinner consists of many dishes, that usually are the typical food of the region where one lives in. For example, here in Emilia-Romagna many people eat *Tortellini* or *Lasagne* (that the most of the times are prepared by the good old grannies). This meal also lasts many hours and it ends late afternoon, but Italians still find time to play with cards or *Tombola* (bingo).

Christmas evening meal is "finally" lighter than the eating sessions before and in the evening people usually watch Christmas movies or go out for a walk in the centre of the town, illuminated by the Christmas lights and decoration.



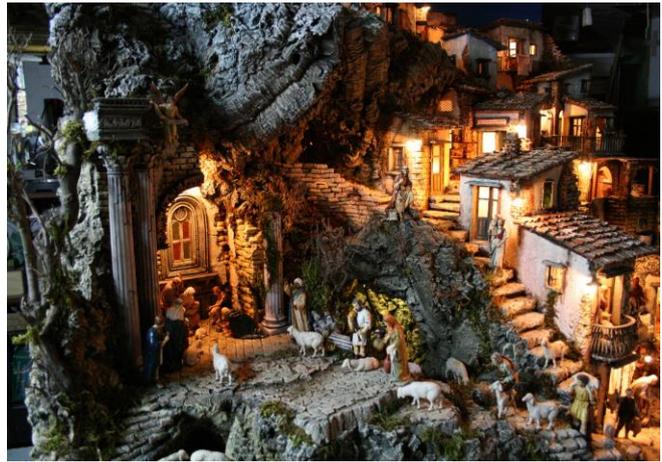
## Christmas traditions

The *presepio* (*crib*) is a little representation of the Holy Family at Jesus' birth.

The *presepio* figures are usually hand-carved and very detailed.

It is often arranged by the families (that love to do that with kids) on the 8<sup>th</sup> December, the *Immacolata* feast (the national holiday that celebrates Mary, mother of Jesus). A

star is always put on the top of the *presepio* because it symbolizes the star that the Three Wise Men followed to reach Jesus' place of birth.



Children in Italy hang up their stockings on the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>. This festivity is to celebrate the visit of the Three Kings to Bethlehem. Children wait for the Befana.

The legend is that the Three Wise Men, *I re magi*, stopped at *Befana's* house to ask for directions on their way to Bethlehem. They asked her to join them, but she declined the offer. Later she

changed her mind and she took some toys and ran to find the kings, but she couldn't find them and not even little Jesus. Therefore, each year since then she leaves the gifts for the good children and pieces of charcoal for the bad ones.



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<http://goitaly.about.com/od/festivalsandevents/tp/italy-holidays.htm>