

# Traditions in the Czech Republic

We are going to present you some Czech traditions and national holidays.

## Christmas

### Christmas day

We usually celebrate Christmas on the 24th of December, but the Christmas time begins with the 1st Sunday in December, 1st advent Sunday. During advent time the whole country is covered with a lot of decorations, candles, light bulbs etc. (Sometimes it can be commercial and tawdry).



*Shopping centre*



*Prague*

Christmas day can be for some families the only time of year when they are together. We spend all day long by walking, talking to each other and preparing for Christmas dinner.

### Christmas dinner

Dinner is served after sunset and consists of carp and potato salad, fish soup and mushroom kuba. Some families keep their carp in the bathtub for several days as a temporary pet for their children. Traditional Christmas bread called vánočka used to be part of the Christmas dinner in the past but today it has largely lost its Christmas connotation and is available year-round. We can't forget to mention typical Christmas sweets called cukroví.



*Cukroví*



*Vánočka*

## Christmas presents

After dinner, everyone around the table may sing Christmas carols before moving to the Christmas tree, which is all lit up and beautiful. By then, presents have been placed under the tree. Czech children believe that Christmas gifts are brought by Baby Jesus (Ježíšek) who comes into the room through the window to leave the presents. Unlike Santa Claus, Baby Jesus is a rather abstract figure with no particular physical image attached to him, and no one knows where he lives. Just like Santa though, he receives wish-list letters from Czech children a few weeks before Christmas.

## Christmas mass

Some people, even atheists, attend the midnight mass. It usually starts at midnight, but in some bigger churches it starts a little bit earlier.

## December 25 – 26

In those days people just relax and visit friends or grandparents.

## Easter

Easter in the Czech Republic is one of the most important Christian holiday. Some traditions are celebrated only in small villages, but some are still popular around the whole country. Before Easter itself is Holy Week, which commemorates the life of Jesus Christ, mainly his death and resurrection. The individual days in Holy Week have names: Holy Wednesday (Spy Wednesday), Green Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. After these days are Easter Sunday and Easter Monday.

## Holy Week

On Green Thursday, every boy in the village equips himself with a wooden rattle. Boys walk through the village, rattling their rattles so it can be noisy. The meaning of the rattling is to chase away Judas. The same procedure repeats on Good Friday and one more time on White Saturday when boys don't walk only through the village but stop at every house in the morning and rattle until they're given money, which they then split among themselves.

## Easter Sunday

On Easter Sunday we celebrate delight in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a day of preparations for Easter Monday. Girls paint, color and decorate eggs if they haven't done so already, and boys prepare their pomlázka (made of pussywillow twigs).



*Pomlázka*

## Easter Monday

Boys go carolling and lightly whip girls' legs with pomlázka. The girl should give the boy a painted egg or candy and tie a ribbon around his pomlázka. Whipping should bring health and youth for the rest of the year to everyone who is whipped with the young pussywillow twigs.

## Easter meals

The traditional meals involve meat, especially minced meat in combinations with eggs or various meat fillings. On Holy Saturday some people make a hot cross bun. It is a spiced sweet bun made of currants or raisins and marked with a cross on the top hot cross buns. Most people eat easter lamb cake at Easter like a dessert. Another traditional easter meal is a stuffing.



*Lamb cake*

## National holidays

In the Czech Republic we have twelve national holidays, some of them are more celebrated, some of them less. You probably know the 8th of May – Liberation Day (the end of the 2nd World war) or New Year's Day or some international holidays. But we have also our unique ones. I will mention some of them.

**5th of July – Saint Cyril and Methodius Day:** In 863, Church teachers St. Cyril (Constantine) and Metoděj (Methodius) came from the Balkans to Great Moravia to propagate Christian faith and literacy.

**6th of July – Jan Hus Day:** The religious reformer Jan Hus was burned at the stake in 1415.

**28th of September – St. Wenceslas day:** In 935, St. Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia, now patron of the Czech State, was murdered by his brother.

**28th of October - Independent Czechoslovak State Day:** Creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918

**17th of November - Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day:** Commemorating the student demonstration against Nazi occupation in 1939, and the demonstration in 1989 that started the Velvet Revolution (overthrowing of socialistic regime).

- During these days we have days off for one day.

## **All souls' day**

All Souls' Day falls on November 2nd. The official Czech name is Památka zesnulých ("a remembrance of those who have passed"), but everyone calls the day dušičky. People sometimes compare this old tradition to Halloween, but the two don't have much in common. Dušičky is a quiet time in the Czech Republic. People visit the graves of family members and relatives to light candles, lay flowers and wreaths and spend a few moments. If All Souls' Day falls on a work day, trips to the cemetery are often taken during the preceding or following weekend.