

# Spain



In Spain it is a very festive time at Christmas. On Christmas Eve, tiny oil lamps are lit in every house, and after Midnight Mass and Christmas Dinner, streets fill with dancers and onlookers. There is a special Christmas dance called the **Jota** and the words and music have been handed down for hundreds of years. They dance to the sound of guitars and castanets.

Most homes have a manger, much like cathedrals and churches. These are complete with carved figures. During the weeks before Christmas, families gather around their manger to sing, while children play tambourines and dance.

Christmas is a deeply religious holiday in Spain. The country's patron saint is the **Virgin Mary** and the Christmas season officially begins December 8, the **feast of the Immaculate Conception**. It is celebrated each year in front of the great Gothic cathedral in Seville with a ceremony called **Los Seises** (Dance of Six).



Christmas Eve is known as **Nochebuena** or (the Good Night). Most people in Spain go to Midnight Mass or **La Misa Del Gallo** (The Mass of the Rooster). It is called this because a rooster is supposed to have crowed the night that Jesus was born. It is a time for family members to gather together to rejoice and feast around the Nativity scenes that are present in nearly every home.



pavo trufado de Navidad



turrón

Most families eat their main Christmas meal on Christmas Eve before the service. The traditional Spanish Christmas dinner is **Pavo Trufado de Navidad** which is Turkey stuffed with mushroom truffles. In north-west Spain in Galicia the most popular meal for Christmas Eve and for Christmas Day is seafood. This includes all kinds of different seafood, from shellfish and mollusk, to lobster and small edible

crabs. A traditional Christmas treat is **turrón**, a kind of almond candy.

December 28 is the **Día de los santos inocentes** (feast of the Holy Innocents). Young boys light bonfires and one of them acts as the mayor who orders townspeople to perform civic chores such as sweeping the streets.

On **Nochevieja** (New Year's Eve) or "The Old Night" in Spain one special tradition is that you eat 12 grapes with the 12 strokes of the clock at Midnight! Each grape represents a month of the coming year, so if you eat the twelve grapes, you are said to be lucky in the New Year.

The children of Spain receive gifts on **Fiesta de Los tres Reyes Magos** (the festival of the three Magic Kings). This is the **feast of the Epiphany** and the twelfth night after Christmas. Children think of the Three Wise Man as the gift bearers. Tradition has it that they arrive on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the date the Wise Men



gave gifts to Jesus. Shoes are filled with straw or barley for the tired camels that must carry their riders through the busy night. By morning the camel food is gone and in place of the straw or barley are presents. Shoes also may be placed on balconies in the hope that the Wise Men will fill them with gifts. Their favorite is Balthazar who rides

a donkey and is the one believed to leave the gifts.



Gifts are often left by the children for the Kings, a class of Cognac for each King, a citrus **satsuma** and some walnuts. Sometimes a bucket of water is left for the camels that bring the Kings!

A special cake called **Roscón** is eaten at

Epiphany. Roscón means “ring shape roll.” It is very doughy and is bought from a bakery on Epiphany morning. Roscón can be filled with cream or chocolate and contain a little gift.



In Spanish “Happy/Merry Christmas” is “**Feliz Navidad.**”

**Resources:**

Australian Media Pty. Santa’s Net. “Christmas in Spain”. <http://www.santas.net/spanishchristmas.htm>

The North Pole. Christmas Around the World. “Christmas in Spain”. <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/spain.html>

Why Christmas? “Christmas in Spain”. <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/spain.shtml>