

## Christmas Traditions Only Czechs Will Understand

### Pet a carp

The traditional Czech Christmas meal consists of fried carp. Many families actually **buy this fish alive** and **keep it in their bathtubs** for days or weeks until it's ready to be cooked. In recent years, a lot of families have changed the tradition to avoid animal cruelty – they still buy the carp but on Christmas Eve, they release it into a river rather than eating it. Potato salad and soups are also a big part of Christmas celebrations, which mainly happen on the night of the 24th. Some people eat salmon or řízek – snitzel/ breaded and fried meat instead.



### The TV is on all day

On December 24th, **local channels show fairy tales all day long** and it's a tradition for families to wake up on that day, turn the TV on and just leave it on **in the background for the entire day**. In many homes, the **TV even stays on during dinner** or people listen to carols on the radio.



### There is no Santa Claus

On Christmas Day you won't find kids searching for Santa and his reindeer to deliver presents. Instead, **presents are delivered by Baby Jesus** and the **delivery is usually announced by the ringing of a bell**. It can happen at any time, but it's often done while the kids are still at the table eating.



There's no "official" image of what Baby Jesus looks like and no real explanation of how he actually delivers the gifts (there's no magic sled involved). And while **Baby Jesus doesn't have a "naughty or nice" list**, there's another celebration earlier in December where you're at risk of receiving coal if you've misbehaved. **That happens on December 5th, when St. Nicholas, accompanied by an angel and the devil, takes to the streets**. On that day, children can expect a visit from the three figures, where they'll be either rewarded or punished for their behavior the previous year.

### Foretelling the future/ superstitions

Common foods and items are used on Christmas Eve day to foretell your fortune for the coming year. For example, an **old tradition says an unmarried girl should throw a shoe over her shoulder**. If the shoe falls pointing towards a nearby door, marriage is on the cards for the coming year. Nobody is allowed to get up from their chair during the Christmas dinner. Everybody must wait to the end of the dinner otherwise the family won't get together next year. The person who gets up is meant to die within a year!

Another way to foretell whether your coming year will be **lucky or unlucky is to cut an apple in half**. If the core has four pointy corners, bad luck is on its way to you; five corners indicate health and happiness.

**Nobody is allowed to get up from their chair during the Christmas dinner**. Everybody must wait to the end of the dinner otherwise the family won't get together next year. The person who gets up is meant to die within a year! **Washing/laundry must not be done** or hung up on Christmas Eve or someone in the family might die!

**Fish scales are placed under the plates on the Christmas dinner table** to hope that you will have enough money in the following year. **Small candles are put into nutshells and are floated on water in a basin or bowl**. If your nutshell stays at the edge you'll stay at home in the following year. If it floats far you'll leave your home and go 'to the world'.

### Presents are opened on the 24th

Since **Baby Jesus usually delivers gifts while you're still eating dinner**, part of the fun on the 24th is trying to keep the kids from leaving the table too soon! Once the gifts are delivered, **everybody gathers and sits around the Christmas tree to open/ unwrap presents**. In most homes, Christmas Eve dinner means **dressing up in your finest clothes**.



### On the 25th December

People visit their relatives, grandparents, friends, relax, watch TV, go skiing to the mountains.

## On the 31st December New Year's Eve

People eat open sandwiches (chlebíčky), watch fireworks, watch TV

### Christmas Markets

The markets offer all sorts of Christmas goodies. Mulled wine is always a big hit; other stalls sell sugared almonds, cheese, knitted wear, decorations, jewelry, toys, roast chestnuts, Prague ham, and more. A relative newcomer to the market scenes is the stalls selling fair-trade products. Much of one's cookie shopping can be done here, if you'd rather not bake cookies yourself, or if time is an issue.

As the years go on, the markets become bigger and more elaborate. Prague's Old Town Square has a large market, as do Namesti Miru and Namesti Republiky. The Old Town Square boasts a gigantic tree, the lighting of which is an event in and of itself. A large stage is set, with live performances all day, every day. This is serious business!

Czech Christmas words you definitely need to know

Christmas is a special holiday for us all. People getting presents for their dearest ones, spending time with their families, going on big family lunches... which of course requires special vocabulary. So let's take a look at what words you might need to know for a Christmas holiday and New Year's Eve in the Czech Republic!

### Christmas (Vánoce)

A traditional Christmas tree (Vánoční stromček or just stromček) is usually a pine (borovice) or spruce (smrk) decorated with ornaments/ decorations (in general called ozdoby, made of glass or straw (sláma), the round glass ones/ baubles [bábls] are called baňky) and candles (svíčky) or lights (světýlka). Some families have an artificial tree made of plastic (umělý stromček).



← ZVONEČEK



↑ KAPR

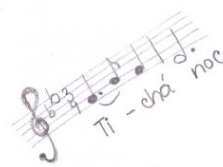
As you probably know, the most important day is the 24th December, called Generous Day or Evening (Štědrý den/večer). The tree is put up and decorated usually in the morning of the 24th. During the day, people prepare dinner, go for a walk and watch fairytales (pohádky) on TV. Even though the Czechs are not fond of Russian culture, one of the most popular Christmas fairytale is Jack Frost (Mrazík) ([wikipedia](#)). Another very popular fairytale is Three Wishes/Nuts/Gifts for Cinderella (Tři oříšky pro Popelku) ([wikipedia](#)).



↑ CUKROVÍ

The traditional Christmas dinner includes fried carp (smažený kapr), potato salad (bramborový salát) and of course Christmas cookies (cukroví). The most traditional cookies are linzers or linz tarts (linecká kolečka), vanilla crescents (vanilkové rohlíčky), bear paws (pracny/pracky), beehives (vosí hnízda) and of course gingerbreads (perníčky). If you're interested, here's a video recipe for linz tarts ([youtube](#)).

After the traditional dinner, Christmas carols (koledy) are sung and Baby Jesus (Ježíšek) brings the gifts (dárky) and puts them underneath the Christmas tree. At midnight, many people go to the church (kostel) to attend the Midnight Mass (Půlnoční mše or just Půlnoční).



↑ KOLEDA

### New Year's Eve (Silvestr)

The celebrations of New Year's differ very much family to family. Some people go out to a pub, some stay at home. Since the 31st is a working day (pracovní den), not a public holiday (státní svátek), the celebrations start in the evening. People usually have a toast (přípitek) with Champagne (šampaňské) at midnight and then go outside to set off firecrackers (petardy). The 1st January is a public holiday, so the celebrations and welcoming of the new year sometimes last till the morning.

### Veselé Vánoce a šťastný nový rok!