

What about Christmas in Slovenia?

Writing to you from Ljubljana is Lidija Bertoncelj, a mentoress of English study groups at Slovenian U3A.

When I was a little girl in former Yugoslavia Christmas (Slov. Božič) was not overtly celebrated but hidden away from the eyes of people who were not members of our family. On Christmas Eve many worked till late in the afternoon and then hurried home even if there was no celebration. Christmas was mostly replaced by Saint Nicholas's Day and the New year's Eve expected with great excitement. It was impossible to celebrate New Year's Eve in a restaurant without having booked a table at least a month in advance. There was also Father Frost that had replaced the Christian Santa Clause. In those times Father Frost came to the center of the town bringing presents to children. Father Frost was invited to all companies to be celebrated by children and their parents. We liked these celebrations as Trade Unions offered us, children, candies, shoes, etc. These were rare commodities in the post war Yugoslavia of which Slovenia was a part.



Mojca Močnik, a friend of mine, focused while facing Father Frost expecting that he would be mad at her being occasionally naughty. The celebration took place in the company where her mother was employed and Father Frost was one of her mother's work colleagues



Group portrait with Father Frost 1957

The four Advent Sundays

Today, some Slovenians who are Christian tend to follow religious traditions. One of the traditions is **the four Advent Sundays**, which lead up to **Christmas**. Traditionally, during this time, there are no major events and you are even not supposed to marry (nor get divorced?) during the Advent Sundays.

Slovenians mostly decorate their homes with **wreaths** and each Advent Sunday they lit up a candle and put it on the wreath. The four candles symbolize the light that announces the coming birth of Jesus Christ like in other Eu countries, I suppose.

In the beginning of December, Slovenian people plant grains of wheat to grow until Christmas. I used to grow it not even knowing what it meant. The growth of a grain into a wheat is a symbol of life's force, as well as of human hope. Wheat is believed to instill new life energy into the household, and it is believed to bring positive thoughts to families.

Now, while preparing this presentation I suddenly got aware of the reason for choosing wheat as a symbol of lifelong education and made a film encouraging older learners to join Slovenian U3A,

<https://www.facebook.com/211029192594431/videos/1005917793189588>

Christmas Dishes



It happened decades ago in December in Germany. What I really liked about my hotel, situated in the old town, were **baskets aligned along the staircase filled up with nuts, apples and fruit bread.**

Later on I discovered that one of the biggest Slovenian Christmas traditions had been **the baking of Christmas** bread as well. Women would gather together in a kitchen and bake three loaves of bread. They would set up a table and decorate the loaves with **a nativity scene**. According to the tradition – all family members, extended family included, had to eat **the first loaf on Christmas, the second on the New Year's Eve, and the third one on the 'Three Wise Men' celebration, on the 6th of January.**

The tradition dictates that the **Christmas table should be well-lit with candles**, since light symbolizes happiness and good fortune for the coming year.

Another popular dish which is always present at every Christmas table, across Slovenia – is **potiza**. Of course, nowadays you can find potiza in many countries but it is still considered as genuinely Slovenian - at least in this country. *Potiza* is a round cake made with different fillings, such as walnuts, cocoa, coconut, and more. Some other favorite Slovenian Christmas delights are the Bundt cake made with raisins and walnuts, plus the gingerbread and cinnamon cookies.



The advent wreath

Pre-Christmas Cleaning and Fasting

In the past, Slovenians used to fast on the Christmas Eve, but nowadays they fast one day before, on the 23rd of December. The dinner **on the Christmas Eve** is somewhat small and humble. However, the breakfast on the next morning is usually laden with **meat, different types of cheese, Christmas bread, and sweets.**



Christmas is a Time for Family and Outing with Friends

Christmas is also the special time of the year when the extended family come together. The same could be said maybe only for Easter. In general, Slovenians tend to stay at home on the Christmas Eve. They usually visit their family and friends during the day. They would also bring each other presents and enjoy the special holiday delights.

The period around Christmas is a time for us to reflect on the past year and to be surrounded with people we love. It is also the time to leave everything bad and negative behind, and focus on a new start. The next year will surely bring countless new opportunities for a fresh beginning.

Sveta Noč /Silent Night/ Most Popular Christmas Carol In Slovenia was translated from German into Slovene by Jakob Aljaž in 1871



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU-GXKefFOo>

Sveta noč, blažena noč,
vse že spi, je polnoč.
Le devica z Jožefom tam
v hlevcu varje detece nam.
Spavaj dete sladkó,
spavaj dete sladkó.

Sveta noč, blažena noč,
prišla je k nam pomoč.
Dete božje v jasliah leži,
grešni zemlji radost deli.
Rojen je Rešenik,
rojen je Rešenik.

Sveta noč, blažena noč,
radostno pevajoč
angeli Gospoda slavé,
mir ljudem na zemlji želé.
Človek zdaj si otet,
človek zdaj si otet.