

Christmas Dinner from One Region to the Next

Samantha Janazzo (December 06, 2016)



Pick a place at the table, tie on your napkin, and get ready to explore a few regions in Italy and what meals are prepared to make a statement at Christmas dinner.

From Italy's northernmost cities down to the southern coasts of Sicily, Christmas culinary traditions change from one region to the next, just like the climate. However, one very important commonality connects them all: great food! [Panettone](#) [2], [pandoro](#) [3], seafood, soup, pasta, meat and more keep Christmas spirits bright and appetites satisfied with the world's merriest holiday. Throughout Italy, the highly anticipated feast production either begins on the 24th or the 25th of December. The activity continues through the 26th for Saint Steven's day, a National holiday where family togetherness continues with card games and relaxation.

Let's explore a few regions of Italy and the dishes that might be found on the dinner table during Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. One wonderful thing about tradition is its ability to adapt and change year to year and generation to generation. Some of the dishes stated may not be precisely how every holiday specific to the region is celebrated in Italy, but it will provide a general understanding of Christmas cookery.

Residents of Lombardy, depending on their family tradition, celebrate the largest portion of



Christmas on the 25th. It is, however, typical to have a lighter meal the previous night. On the dinner table you will find a large golden turkey, or [faraona](#) [4], stuffed with chestnuts, pine nuts, sweetened glazed fruit, that glistens with smeared fresh marmalade. This truly provides the perfect sweet, savory, and salty combination. From the remaining juice of the boiled meat, a gorgeous steaming tortellini soup is prepared that will keep the Italian tradition warm and tasty with each spoonful.

A Veneto Christmas is a true delight, the large celebration commences with a seafood based Christmas Eve. [Baccalà](#) [5]à [5], or cod, is whipped into a decadent fluffy cream and spread on fresh warm bread for an appetizer. Dinner is complete with fresh polenta topped generously with tiny sauteed shrimp and paired with a classic red tomato sauce. Fruity Pandoro with light mascarpone cream will cure all the long awaited Christmas cravings.

A Christmas in Tuscany usually kicks off midday on the 25th of December. Wide pieces of fresh spaghetti or [pasta alla chitarra](#) [6] is accompanied by a large serving of fresh ragù that has simmered and reduced on the stove, warming the house for hours with the delicious aroma of the authentic meat sauce. Lamb or wild boar cook in the oven until golden brown for the main course paired with delicious vegetables.

Lazio celebrates the night before Christmas Day. [Fritto misto alla romana](#) [7] is a feast of fried vegetables like artichokes, broccoli and zucchini coalesced together and enhanced with small fried pieces of baccala fish. Dinner is a piping hot savory lasagna, or a heavy pasta with red sauce for the perfect Roman Christmas.

The typical Christmas in Abruzzo is quite charming and the celebration inaugurates on Christmas Eve. Once again, pieces of baccalà are cut small and fried until perfectly crisp and golden brown with a warm and flaky exterior to be served as an appetizer. Then, the perfect red sauce is mixed with fresh tuna and served over long pieces of spaghetti for the main course. On the side is torta rustica, a classic Italian soup with a meat based broth and dumpling-like pieces of crust soaked in, normally the base is pork or another light meat with a variety of vegetables.

Christmas Eve in Calabria is a primarily meatless affair. [Insalata di frutti di mare](#) [8] is a combination of various muscles, clams, shrimp, and calamari served in a light olive oil and garlic based juice—a wonderful dipping sauce for warm bread. The main pasta is served with tiny clams in fresh red sauce over a steaming hot plate of pasta.

A Sicilian Christmas Eve is also another pescatarian extravaganza, abundant with diverse types of fish and loads of vegetables. [Sicilian eggplant caponata](#) [9] is a dish that bubbles with natural sapor combined with a reduction of peppers, plump tomatoes, green olives, oregano and basil for seasoning; which all cause an explosion of authenticity and flavor when served warm. For dinner, there is a mixture of swordfish with fresh tomatoes with fennel and broccoli rabe.

Whether the gastronomic marathon begins on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, it is clear to say that wherever the holiday is celebrated in Italy, there is a treat waiting at every festivity. For a small country there are countless differences in climate and food culture that transforms Christmas from one city to the next, but the reason to celebrate the season remains the same. Buon Natale!

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[1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/cena-di-natalejpg>

[2] <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/mario-batali/panettone-recipe.html>

[3] <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/mario-batali/golden-cake-from-verona-pandoro-di-verona-recipe.html>

[4] <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/mario-batali/guinea-hen-with-red-wine-faraona-al-vino-rosso->



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[5] <http://www.italymagazine.com/featured-story/tradition-baccala-italian-cuisine>

[6] https://www.washingtonpost.com/recipes/spaghetti-alla-chitarra/15184/?utm_term=.6eb8a9ea0f60

[7] <http://www.lacuoquinasopraffina.com/cosa-cucino/fritto-misto-alla-romana-vigilia-natale/8791>

[8] <http://www.serious-eats.com/2016/03/how-to-make-italian-seafood-salad.html>

[9] <http://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/253031/sicilian-eggplant-caponata>