vinetur

How Nations Celebrate Christmas Through Food Wine and Tradition

Festive meals reflect local climates and traditions, with wine and sparkling drinks uniting celebrations from France to Argentina and beyond

Tuesday, December 23, 2025



Around the world, Christmas dinner is a moment of family gathering and celebration, marked by a wide range of culinary traditions and festive drinks. Each country brings its own history, climate, and customs to the table, creating unique menus that reflect local culture. In many places, wine and other beverages play a central role in these holiday

feasts.

In **France**, Christmas Eve is synonymous with refined gastronomy. Families often start with fresh oysters paired with dry white wines such as Muscadet or Chablis. Foie gras on toasted bread is another classic starter, typically enjoyed with sweet or aromatic wines like Sauternes or Gewürztraminer. The main course is usually roast turkey stuffed with chestnuts, though regional variations include goose in Alsace or duck confit in the southwest. These dishes are accompanied by high-quality red wines from Bordeaux or Burgundy. After the main course, a cheese board appears, often matched with white wine or vintage Champagne. For dessert, the bûche de Noël—a rolled sponge cake decorated to resemble a log—is served, frequently alongside Champagne. Regional traditions add further variety: in Provence, the “gros souper” ends with 13 different desserts, while Alsace features spiced wine and German-influenced pastries.

Italy’s Christmas revolves around family and religious tradition. On Christmas Eve, many Italians observe a meatless meal focused on fish and seafood—especially in the south, where the “Feast of the Seven Fishes” is common. In the north, antipasti and tortellini in broth are popular starters. The main Christmas Day meal features roasted meats such as capon or lamb, depending on the region, served with side dishes like potatoes or polenta. Italian wines are essential: Barolo from Piedmont, Chianti from Tuscany, or Nero d’Avola from Sicily are chosen to match the menu. For dessert, panettone and pandoro are staples across Italy, often enjoyed with sparkling Prosecco for toasts. In colder regions, Bombardino—a hot drink made from egg liqueur and brandy—is also popular.

In **Spain**, Christmas Eve brings together family for a generous meal that varies by region but always includes appetizers like Iberian ham and cheeses. Seafood is prominent on coastal tables; inland regions favor roast lamb or suckling pig as the main dish. Rioja and Ribera del Duero reds are common wine choices for meat dishes, while Cava—Spain’s sparkling wine—is used for toasts at midnight. The dessert table overflows with turrón (nougat), marzipan, polvorones (almond cookies), and other sweets. On Christmas Day, some families prepare canelones using leftovers from the previous night.

Portugal’s Christmas Eve dinner—Consoada—centers on bacalhau (salted cod) boiled with potatoes and greens, dressed with olive oil. In some northern areas, octopus replaces cod as the main dish. After midnight mass, it is customary to leave food and wine on the table overnight as an offering. On Christmas Day, roast kid or lamb is served for lunch. Portuguese desserts include Bolo Rei (a fruitcake ring), rabanadas (similar to French toast), and aletria (sweet vermicelli pudding). Port wine is traditionally served with dessert or nuts at the end of the meal.

Germany’s Christmas dinner features hearty winter fare such as roast goose with red cabbage and dumplings. In some homes, duck or baked fish may be served instead. Fondue or raclette is also popular for informal gatherings on Christmas Eve. The season’s signature drink is Glühwein—hot mulled wine spiced with cinnamon and cloves—served at markets and at home to ward off the cold. German bakeries produce a variety of holiday cookies like Lebkuchen (gingerbread) and Stollen (fruit bread). Sekt (German sparkling wine) is often used for toasts.

In the **United Kingdom**, Christmas Day lunch centers on roast turkey with stuffing, potatoes, Brussels sprouts, pigs in blankets (sausages wrapped in bacon), and cranberry sauce. The meal concludes with Christmas pudding—steamed fruitcake flambéed at the table—and mince pies filled with spiced fruit. Drinks include Champagne or English sparkling wine for toasts; during the meal, both red and white wines are served according to preference. Mulled wine or cider is enjoyed throughout December at markets and gatherings. After lunch, sherry or port may be sipped while watching the royal broadcast.

In the **United States**, Christmas dinner varies widely but often features roast turkey or glazed ham as the centerpiece, accompanied by mashed potatoes with gravy, sweet potatoes topped with marshmallows in some regions, green bean casserole, bread rolls, and cranberry sauce. Eggnog—a creamy drink made from milk, eggs, sugar, spices, and spirits—is a holiday staple served cold throughout December. Apple cider (hot or cold) is also common. For dessert, pumpkin pie or pecan pie are favorites alongside gingerbread cookies decorated by children for Santa Claus. American wines from California are frequently chosen for dinner pairings.

Argentina celebrates Christmas during summer with outdoor gatherings on December 24th. The menu includes grilled beef cuts (asado), roast suckling pig (lechón), vitel toné (cold veal in tuna sauce), Russian salad (potato salad), Waldorf salad (apple-celery-walnut salad), cold cuts and cheese platters—all suited to warm weather. At midnight families toast with sparkling cider or Champagne; Malbec red wine from Mendoza accompanies grilled meats throughout dinner. The dessert table features pan dulce (fruit-studded sweet bread), peanut nougat bars (turrón de maní), mantecol (peanut halva), ice cream desserts and fresh fruit salads.

Chile's summer Christmas combines local traditions with imported ones: roast poultry such as turkey or chicken is common in urban areas alongside papas duquesas (small potato croquettes). In southern regions lamb barbecue may take center stage; seafood dishes appear near the coast. Chilean red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon or Carmenère are standard accompaniments; Sauvignon Blancs are chosen for lighter fare. For dessert there's Pan de Pascua—a dense fruitcake—and Cola de Mono: a chilled coffee-and-milk liqueur flavored with aguardiente.

Australia's holiday falls during peak summer vacation season; many families opt for outdoor buffet lunches featuring cold cuts of ham or beef alongside fresh seafood such as prawns and oysters. Salads abound—potato salad is especially popular—and some maintain British traditions of roast turkey served cold due to heat. Australian white wines like Chardonnay accompany seafood; sparkling wines are used for celebratory toasts while beer remains ever-present at barbecues held on beaches or backyards alike. Pavlova—a meringue dessert topped with whipped cream and tropical fruits—is an iconic Australian treat.

South Africa also celebrates Christmas outdoors due to summer weather; families gather around a braai (barbecue) grilling beef steaks, lamb chops and boerewors sausages accompanied by fresh salads and spicy chutneys called sambals. Dishes from various cultural backgrounds appear: bobotie (spiced meat pie) among Cape Malays; curries among Indian communities; pap (maize porridge) among others—all reflecting South Africa's diversity. Local wines—Pinotage reds for grilled meats; Chenin Blanc whites for poultry—are widely enjoyed along with Methode Cap Classique sparkling wines for toasting. Desserts include malva pudding (apricot sponge cake), melktert

(milk tart) and trifle layered with fruit.

Across continents and climates—from oysters in France to barbecues in Australia—the spirit of Christmas unites people through food and drink shared at festive tables everywhere. Wine remains a common thread in many countries' celebrations: whether robust reds for roasts in Europe and South America or crisp whites for seafood under southern skies, it helps bring families together to toast health and happiness during this special season.