

# GREEK CELEBRATIONS



1. As this is a maritime country, the Greeks traditionally decorate boats for Christmas. This custom survives today in seaside towns and islands, where people decorate Christmas boats in the central squares. The Christmas tree is a foreign custom and it was brought by Otto, the first king of the country, who was of Bavarian origin. Over the years, the Christmas tree was integrated into the local culture and now we decorate fir trees in our homes and in squares of mountainous towns.

4. March 25, the day of the Annunciation of Virgin Mary, was set as the day of the beginning of the Greek Revolution, against the Turkish yoke. This date was considered as a reference point from the first days of the Revolution, and even as the beginning of a special dating, even in areas that had revolted earlier. The celebration of the Greek Revolution of 1821 takes place in Greece, Cyprus and in the centers of the Greeks of the diaspora. It is an official holiday in Greece and Cyprus. Celebrations usually include parades and other celebrations on the same day or the day before.

7. Carnival season (=Apokries=abstention from meat, because after that, the period of Easter Lent begins) is a period beginning ten weeks before Greek Orthodox Easter and culminates on the weekend before "Clean Monday," (Ash Monday) the first day of Lent, which is on March 3 this year. A feast of fun is celebrated all over the country with masquerades and parties. The characteristic of Carnival is disguising and wearing costumes and masks that offer anonymity and freedom of expression. This festival dates back to Dionysos, the ancient Greek god of wine, fun and fertility. The biggest carnival that is organized in Greece is that of Patras. Other popular carnivals are that of Xanthi and Rethymno.

2. Vasilopita (=Saint Basil's pie) is a traditional dessert that we make for New Year's Day. Every Vasilopita has a coin inside; the head of the family cuts the pie into pieces, and whoever finds the coin is said lucky person this year. This tradition derives from the myth that residents of Cappadocia had collected money and jewellery to give to the area's tyrannical prefect as a tax. Saint Basil managed to change the prefect's mind and exempt local people from having to give away their valuables. Not knowing how to return the possessions to their owners, the residents followed Saint Basil's advice and made small pies. Saint Basil then put the small "treasures" inside the pies and miraculously each person received their own valuables.

5. The Athens Polytechnic uprising occurred in November 1973 as a massive student demonstration of popular rejection of the Greek military junta of 1967–1974. The uprising began on 14 November 1973, escalated to an open anti-junta revolt, and ended in bloodshed in the early morning of 17 November after a series of events starting with a tank crashing through the gates of the Polytechnic. 17 November is currently observed as a holiday in Greece for all educational establishments; commemorative services are held and students attend school only for these.

8. Great Friday is the holiest day of the week is Great Friday. It is a day of mourning and the only day of the year when the Divine Liturgy is not read. Church bells ring all day in a slow, mournful tone. Traditionally, women and children take flowers to the church to decorate the Epitaphios (the symbolic bier of Christ). The bier is decorated lavishly with flowers and bears the image of Christ. During the service, it is carried on the shoulders of the faithful in a procession that runs through the community to the cemetery and back. Members of the congregation follow, carrying candles.

3. The Anniversary of the "No" commemorates the refusal of Greece to the Italian claims contained in the ultimatum delivered by the Italian ambassador to the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas on October 28, 1940 to allow the Italian Army, ally of Nazi Germany to occupy Greece. This led to the entry of the country into the World War II. The small Greek army fought heroically through many hardships and delayed the attack of the Nazis to the Soviet Union. Women helped the soldiers up on the Pindos Mount by carrying ammunition on their backs all through winter. This date is an official national holiday in Greece and Cyprus. Also, many Greek communities around the world celebrate the Anniversary of No.

6. The 15th of August (the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos=Mother of Christ) is a great religious holiday when almost all Greeks are on holiday or at their villages or country houses. Preparations for it start on August 1st with a period of strict fasting that dictates no meat, dairy, oil and wine. A Great Vespers is held the evening before the Feast, and the Feast itself is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom in the morning. Almost everywhere in Greece there's a chapel or church celebrating and in the eve and after the morning sermon all people have a feast and dance in the squares to live traditional music.

9. On Great Saturday, the Eternal Flame is brought to Greece and distributed to priests who carry it to their churches. After the midnight service the traditional mayirtsa soup, which uses the organs and intestines of the lamb that will be roasted, is eaten. The midnight service of the Resurrection is attended by people holding a candle that is only used for this service (Iambadha). Shortly before midnight, all lights are extinguished and the churches are lit only by the Eternal Fire on the altar. When the clock passes midnight the Priest calls out "Christos Anesti" (Christ is risen) and passes the flame from person to person. Friends and neighbours exchange "Christos Anesti" with one another as a way of wishing one another well. In response they say "Alithos Anesti" (truly He is risen) or "Alithos o Kirios" (true is The Lord)