

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 9

# the CARPATIA *Resorts*

\* CHRISTMAS IN ROMANIA \*



## 'Craciun'

*Christmas is popularly known as 'Craciun' in Romania. The festival was once observed in the country with much fanfare & joyous celebrations by the citizens of Romania. After the country regained its independence in 1989, young adults are now experiencing the Yuletide traditions they previously heard their parents and grandparents discuss.*



## ✧ 'Craciun' Christmas ✧

*Christmas in Romania falls on December 25 and is generally considered one of the most important religious holiday. A very important Christmas custom practiced in Romanian villages is 'Ignatius', the sacrifice of a pig in every house in the honor of Saint Ignatius. A pig is specially chosen for this purpose and fed to make it grow fat, often around 300 pounds.*

### 'IGNATIUS' CEREMONY

This sacrificial ceremony is performed in the back yard of houses 5 days before Christmas. the patriarch makes a sign of the cross on the pig's head and announces to the family - "Let's eat the pig!". Then, a small portion of the pig's meat is immediately fried and a feast is held. All the extended members of the family, friends and neighbors are invited to the feast and the meat is then shared with them, along with

bacon and plum brandy. This feast is known as the pig's funeral feast. Romanians insist that it is performed to ensure that the soul of the pig receives ample gratitude for the nourishment that it provides to all in the family. But the real celebrations begin with the decoration of the Christmas tree on "Ajunul Craciunului" (Christmas Eve). Fig trees happen to be the main Christmas trees in Romania.



## 'Mos Craciun'

*Romanian children believe that 'Mos Craciun' (the Romanian equivalent of Santa Clause) is the one who delivers them their presents.*

Gift exchanges take place in the evening of Christmas Eve, contrary to the American way of opening gifts on Christmas morning. Unlike in the U.S., the Romanian children do not leave milk and cookies out for 'Mos Craciun'.

Economic conditions are harsh in the country and the gifts vary too.





## *knot shaped bread*

Unlike in the U.S., the Romanian children do not leave milk and cookies out for 'Mos Craciun'.. While urban children receive expensive gifts and money, those in the villages have to settle with sweets, fruit, nuts, and pastries as Christmas gifts. A common and popular gift is knot-shaped bread, which, in Romania, symbolizes an abundant harvest. The singing of carols is a very important part of Romanian Christmas festivities.



Throughout the Christmas season, little Romanian children (especially those in the villages) visit every house in the locality singing carols such as Steaua ('The Star'), Trei Pastori ('The Three Shepherds') and Mos Craciun ('Santa Claus') and reciting poems and legends tied to the festival. On the first day of Christmas, many carolers walk through the streets of the towns and villages, holding a star made of cardboard and paper on which are depicted various scenes from the Bible. The leader of the group carries a large wooden star called "Steaua", which is wrapped up with metal foil and adorned with bells and coloured ribbons.

An image of the Nativity is pasted on the center of the star, and the entire handcraft is attached to the end of a broom or stout pole. The singing is taken up first by young children, then the adolescents and lastly the adults, who join in often after midnight). In return for such performances, carolers receive apples, nuts, traditional cakes ('cozonaci') and sometimes even money from each house. Romanian folklores abound with Christmas carols which lend a religious mood to the festival. Churches specially organize concerts to celebrate the occasion.

In Romanian families, all the women cook for three days leading up to 'Craciun'. Christmas dinner in Romania is a rich, multi-course meal. On the top of the menu comes various kinds of pork sausages, along with plum brandy and home made pickles. 'Sarmale' , an indispensable item for the festive dinner, comes next. This dish consists of pickled cabbage leaves stuffed with a combination of pork and beef, along with rice, pepper, thyme and other spices. Other dishes to follow are roasted pork and turkey with red wine. The wine is consumed to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The last item is 'cozonaci', a cake filled with nuts and raisins. All the members of the extended family enjoy the feast together.

