



# Health & Fitness



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Afternoon Despatch & Courier

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# Christmas across the world



Christmas lunch or dinner is a delicious but often calorific affair. But, don't worry; you aren't alone in your elastic pants and loose shirt as the whole world will be indulging! **Rhea Dhanbhoora & Shirley Mistry** tell you more about traditional Christmas treats from across the globe

What fun is any festival without great food, family and friends for company? And Christmas probably tops the list as far as delectable treats are concerned. Right from eggnog and stuffed chicken or turkey to Christmas pudding and hot chocolate with marshmallows, Christmas is that time of the year where you pull out all the stops and savour every mouthful, sip and bite of the special festive feast. In this Christmas special, we take you through a round-up of popular and well-loved Christmas delights from all over the world so you can pick the one best suited to your diet — unless you'd much rather indulge and dismiss it all as holiday weight!

## SMOKED LAMB IN ICELAND

Christmas in Iceland is all about the meat. They traditionally have what is called hangikjöt, a type of smoked lamb that they eat with a flatbread called leaf bread. The rest of their meal consists of traditional foods and a spiced and sweetened rice pudding tops it off as dessert. The meal is not unhealthy, the smoked lamb making up for the rice pudding in the end.

## TURKEY IN AUSTRALIA

If you're thinking of snow, you're probably not thinking of Australia. The land celebrates Christmas in the midst of sweltering heat, but that doesn't keep them away from a Christmas feast. They gorge on a full turkey dinner, complete with Christmas pudding and mince pies akin to British favourites. Modern Australian Christmas includes a barbecue and the choicest meat preparations. Ham is another popular alternative to turkey.

## SALTED COD IN PORTUGAL

Now, this didn't seem much like Christmas to us, but to the Portuguese, there's nothing that says Christmas quite like a salted cod. Served with vegetables and boiled potatoes, it's their traditional Christmas treat. They do load up on Kings Cake (Bolo Rei) after their meal though, which is filled with nuts and candied fruit.

## STEAK SQUARES IN ARGENTINA

The traditional meal here focuses on meat — but not pork, chicken or turkey. Argentinians love eating beef for Christmas, along with mince meat pies. The beef is baked as Nino enveuttas, a steak cut into squares and stuffed with eggs, onions and



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spices. Another interesting part of their meal is the roasted peacock — yes, you read that right!

## CHURROS IN SPAIN

We would pick Spain as our go-to for a Christmas meal. Sure, there's the typical seafood, tapas and dishes as varied as baby eels and baked sea bream, but the focus in Spain is on their desserts! From turrón (a type of nougat) to a type of shortbread called polvorones, marzipan cookies and the traditional Spanish churros, it's all about sweets here.

## CHRISTSTOLLEN IN GERMANY

Apart from all the carbohydrates and salt they consume thanks to the potatoes and meat, Germans are eating a lot more than your average Joe over Christmas because they celebrate it for a good two days. Traditionally, their meal is quite light and healthy, with a roasted goose and carp. But, then there's the sweet tooth that rounds off their meal with traditional German plätzchen (cookies) and the Christstollen (a type of fruit cake dusted with icing sugar) that bring up the calorie count!



## MILANESE CAKE BREAD IN ITALY

In Italy, they're going to eat a lot of meat and pasta on Christmas, because Christmas Eve involves them abstaining from it! So, they're gorging on meat and pasta along with their range of desserts, making it a carbohydrate and fat filled meal. Not to mention the star, Milanese cake bread — not light on the calories. Their feast is known as the Feast of Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve. They sometimes have zabaglione, which is a healthier dessert since it's made with mascarpone and dried fruit.



## BUCHE DE NOEL IN FRANCE

France recently topped a *Daily Mail* list of the healthiest Christmas meals across the world and when you take a look at their menu, you know why. Apart from the chocolate and cream filled Yule Log, Le Reveillon, which is what they call their Christmas meal, is served with delectable treats such as Foie gras, oysters, smoked salmon and crepes. Considering you'd only be indulging on the buttercream loaded Buche de Noel (Yule log), we suggest having a French themed dinner this year.

## BORSCHT IN POLAND

Did you know that a Christmas feast in Poland is known as Wigilia? Translated, it means Star Supper and this means that no one dish stands out. They serve 12 dishes symbolising the 12 Apostles and while it's not too unhealthy a meal, it's a very heavy one! From borscht (beetroot soup) to fried carp (the frying makes it unhealthy) and stuffed dumplings, they top it all off with Babka, a type of sweet bread. Apart from the few fried foods and the carbs in the sweet bread, you're not going to be that unhealthy.

## YORKSHIRE PUDDING IN ENGLAND

When we think of a traditional Christmas, we're often thinking of the Queen's Christmas. Although the traditional roast goose isn't high in calories, the side dishes are the culprits, along with the traditional mince meat pies. Something quintessentially British for Christmas here though is their Yorkshire pudding.

## AEBLESKIVER IN DENMARK

We're thinking Carlsberg and Tuborg too, but Christmas dinner in Denmark is something that you should focus on. Although most of the dinner includes duck, goose and potato dishes along with pickled fish (and yes, beer of course!) a dish to note is their special Christmas donut, called aebleskiver. Needless to say, the deep fried delight doesn't rank very high on our list of healthy foods.

## PORK IN ROMANIA

Romanian pork is a speciality that several restaurants have started serving up off late and with good reason. They pride themselves on their pork preparations so it's no surprise that their Christmas meal centers on it, topped off with plum brandy and raisin-nut cake. They eat varied types of sausage, which means that their meal is heavy on processed meats — high on salt content and not very healthy!

## TAMALES IN MEXICO

Ah! Mexico. In between all their colourful merrymaking, Mexicans do know how to put out a really good spread, especially for Christmas. From stews (mostly fish) to fruits and salads, Mexico is the place to go for a healthy Christmas meal. Of course, that's before you get to their traditional Tamales. The corn dough pastries go really well with their traditional bunuelos (fritters) and round off their meal brilliantly. But, because you're eating mostly stews and fish, you can afford to indulge in a good dessert.

## DRINK UP!

With all the eating that is going to happen this Christmas, you most certainly need something to wash it down with. Take your pick from these traditional Christmas drinks from different parts of the world:

**Eggnog:** A mixture of sugar, milk, cream, eggs and liquors such as brandy, bourbon or rum, cinnamon and nutmeg go into the making of this addictive drink. The frothy, creamy concoction is a favourite in America and Canada but there's nothing that's stopping you from whipping up some yourself.

**Coquito:** This Puerto Rican drink is much heavier than most of the other drinks on this list. Ingredients include spiced rum, condensed milk, coconut milk, vanilla and spices such as cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Also, sometimes, ginger and/or groundnuts are added to the drink which is served chilled in small glasses.

**Mulled wine:** There are different versions of this enhanced red wine that are enjoyed world over. Most popularly, honey, cinnamon, cloves, oranges, apples, ginger and vanilla, or a selection of these spices and fruits are added to red wine and the drink is served warm.

**Ponche Navideño:** This Mexican favourite is made with sugarcane, pears and/or apples, raisins, citrus fruits, prunes and a fruit used only by the Aztecs called texocotl. The alcoholic component in any Ponche Navideño comes from tequila, rum or brandy.

## PENETTONE IN PERU

While Peruvian Christmas usually has the same types of food as the rest of the world; the traditional penettone cake is one of the most popular types of desserts. It is summer in Peru too, so their meal is generally pretty healthy, with a lot of salads and fruit sauces. But the flan, panettone and marzipan add to your calorie count after.



## DECONSTRUCTING THE INDIAN CHRISTMAS SPREAD

A lot has been said about festive Christmas fare from across the world. Read on to familiarise yourself with a traditional Indian Christmas spread and maybe whip up some of these preparations this year too.

**Cutlets:** For starters, families make cutlets with ground meat and mashed potatoes. These are minimally spiced.

**Stuffed Chicken:** A really important component of the entire feast, the chicken is usually stuffed with cold cuts, croutons, raisins, mushrooms and nuts served with a typical brown gravy, sautéed vegetables and mashed potatoes. Each family has its own stuffing recipe that has evolved over generations with many tweaks depending on the likes and dislikes of the many family members.

**Sorpotel:** This is made with pork and mutton liver. Chunks of melt-in-the-mouth meat in a thick gravy, spiced predominantly with chillies, garlic and copious quantities of vinegar and oil give this preparation its rich orange-red colour and fiery taste.



**Vindaloo:** Another must-have at the table is vindaloo, a curry traditionally made with pork. Again spicy and vinegary, this curry uses lesser ingredients than the sorpotel but is equally delicious.

**Fugias:** A fermented and fried bread, fugias have a hint of sweetness to them. The fluffy, soft balls of bread are made with a batter comprising flour, eggs, oil, sugar, water and

yeast that is allowed to rest overnight so that the yeast can get to work, lending the bread its spongy, soft texture. It is eaten with sorpotel and vindaloo and does a great job of mopping up the gravy.

**Wedding Rice or Pulao:** A simple rice preparation made with caramelised onions, cashew nuts and occasionally slices of boiled egg to go with the curries.

**Kul-Kuls:** A popular sweet during Christmas, kul-kuls are made with basic sweetened dough that is shaped either like shells or like little curls and deep fried. They are crunchy, easy to make and a joy to nibble at.

**Milkcream:** Another Christmas special, this dessert is made by adding powdered cashew nuts to reduced milk to make a soft dough that is then rolled into balls or set in moulds.

**Marzipan:** Made with ground almonds, sugar and egg whites, this soft, chewy treat is a favourite with everyone. If you are feeling especially creative, shape them differently or add a few drops of food colouring to the mix to make it more attractive and colourful.