

Immaculate Conception

Name of the holiday in English

Immaculate Conception

2. Name of the Holiday in Italian

Festa dell'immacolata or Immacolata Concezione

3. Date in English

December 8

4. Date in Italian

otto dicembre

5. A brief history of the holiday: What are the origins of this holiday in Italy? Why is it celebrated in Italy? What does it commemorate? What famous people are connected to this holiday?

In 1854 after centuries of theories and theological debates, Pope Pius IX issued the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* that definitively sanctioned Mary's "Immaculate Conception." This official communication thus established that the mother of Jesus was not only born absolutely pure, but was conceived in her mother's womb devoid of Original Sin (and thus "immaculate," without stain). It is one of the most important Marian feasts in the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church.

6. Is it more of a regional holiday or is it celebrated all over Italy? How is this holiday celebrated in Italy? Is it celebrated differently in different regions? Are there any special customs connected with the celebration of this holiday in Italy? Are there any special foods/meals connected with this holiday?

It is a National Holiday - nobody works.

Throughout Italy, December 8 opens the Christmas season. In homes across most of the country, the tree is decorated, and the nativity scene is prepared. Italians visit art cities, explore exhibitions, and experience Christmas markets, and begin their Christmas shopping.

Many Italians attend a church mass to honor Mary. In Rome the pope lays a floral wreath on the statue of the Madonna at the Piazza Mignanelli. Christmas trees are set up and lit and the famous St. Peter's Square nativity scene is set up.

Shops sell paintings, statues, relics, and artwork related to Mary.

In some places there is street entertainment by jugglers and street clowns.

It is particularly popular in southern Italy mainly because the Immaculate Conception was the patron saint of the Kingdom of the Two Sicily's.

- In Matera, Basilicata they start fasting on December 7 to prepare for the feast on December 8. On the 8th children and elderly nibble on **Tarallo dell'Immacolata (pan di tarallo)** while everyone else dips them in wine. This keeps everyone from getting hungry until the big meal that includes cod, spaghetti with garlic, oil, and chili pepper, (**spaghetti aglio e olio**).
- In some regions such as Abruzzo, Puglia, Marche, and Umbria, fires are lit, and fritters are prepared! The fires symbolize the elimination of original sin, fertility, and family unity. In Puglia they fry cakes called **pettole or pitulle** accompanied by **vin cotto**, a wine

made with grapes and figs. They **also** prepare **puccia**, a bread filled with breadcrumbs and served with tuna and Swiss cheese plus a dish of **baccala in pignata con patate**.

- Campania, especially in Naples, the Immaculate Conception is celebrated in commemoration of a miracle when a fisherman prayed to Mary and was saved. They place flowers at the Obelisk of the Immaculate Conception in Piazza del Gesu', and they set up lights and traditional fairs such as the fair of San Biagio dei Librai, San Gregorio Armeno, and Rione Sanita'. In Naples faith and art come together as they start gearing up for Neapolitan Christmas. They enjoy eating the **Roccoco'** cake filled with almonds and spices.
- In Sicily some towns hold processions such as the **Mattutino** in Altofonte, Palermo. During the procession they eat and drink sweets such as the **vastedde**, a flatbread seasoned with oil, cheese, and ricotta or **mafoletta, sfincete, or petrafennula**. In Termini Imerese and Syracuse there are processions, band concerts, and fireworks. In Messina they celebrate by eating **nipitidda**, a filled puff pastry.

7. List as many ideas as possible on how we can incorporate these holiday celebrations at our lodges to foster interest in Italian culture, heritage, and language. Think of activities that would appeal to different age levels (children, young adults, other members, families, specific interest groups).

- Prepare the Christmas tree in the lodges with Christmas ornaments that have an Italian theme.
- Set up a traditional **Presepe**, manger.
- Learn about the traditions and origins of the **Presepe**, especially the Neapolitan Presepe.
- Prepare and serve some of the dishes mentioned above.
- Learn the "Hail Mary" prayer in Italian.
- Learn about Italian art that portrays the Immaculate Conception (Mary, the mother of Jesus).