

Holy Week/Easter Sunday/Easter Monday

La Settimana Santa/Pasqua/La Pasquetta

The word "Pasqua" comes from the Hebrew word "Pesach", which means "Passover". Easter is a Christian holiday that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, three days after his crucifixion. It is the most important Christian holiday and is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. Easter week in Italy includes Palm Sunday (**Domenica dei Palmi**), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, (**Giovedì Santo**), Good Friday (**Venerdì Santo**), Easter Day, (**Pascua**), and Easter Monday (**Pasquetta**). (Wikipedia)

In 325 AD, during the Council of Nicaea, it was decided that Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox. Easter, therefore, can fall on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25. However, fixing the date or the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus was not completely resolved until the 8th century.

It is celebrated in Italy due to the historical and cultural importance of the Catholic church since most Italians identify as Roman Catholic. The religious meaning is that Easter is Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. Easter is one of the most important holidays in Italy celebrated through regional traditions and rituals that reflect local food, wine, processions, games, fairs, reenactments, local customs, and other types of festivities.

Although Easter is associated with spring, fertility, and re-birth, for Christian in Italy Easter commemorates mostly the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The varied regional traditions reflect both components.

Easter week celebration in Italy

- **Palm Sunday** (**Domenica dei Palmi**) is celebrated the Sunday before Easter and is an important religious observance. It commemorates the entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. The faithful flock go to church where mass and a procession are held. During the procession, people sing hymns and chant prayers to honor Jesus. Baskets of olive branches and palms are blessed by the priest and are handed out to the congregation. These blessed branches are then taken home and placed at the entrance of their homes until next year's Palm Sunday when they are replaced.
- **Holy Thursday** (**Giovedì Santo**) is a commemoration of the Last Supper and reflects the religious beliefs of Italians. They attend church services and participate in religious processions or the Stations of the Cross (**Via Crucis**), praying in front of a series of images that represent the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and death.
- **Good Friday** (**Venerdì Santo**) is a reenactment of the Jesus' journey to the cross and in many towns the faithful participate either in a solemn procession that features a statue of the crucified Christ on the cross or the Via Crucis, all while praying, chanting, and carrying candles and often dressed in traditional ancient costumes. Some towns hold live passion plays. On Good Friday into Holy Saturday many Italians fast from eating meat or eating between meals.
- **Holy Saturday** (**Sabato Santo**) continues the traditions of praying and fasting especially in some Southern Italian regions. The tradition of eating egg-based dishes is also common. My family has the custom of eating an asparagus frittata for lunch on Holy Saturday.

- **Easter Sunday (Pasqua)** is a day of celebration all over Italy with attendance at mass, dinner with family, processions, parades, games, re-enactments, fireworks etc. that vary from region to region, city to city. Some of these special Easter events are listed below.
- **Easter Monday (la Pasquetta)** is celebrated with picnics featuring egg dishes like frittata, hard boiled eggs, cheeses. Some towns offer free concerts, hold dances, or sponsor unusual games. There's an Italian saying, "Natale con i suoi, Pasqua con chi vuoi," which means "Christmas with your relatives, Easter with who you want." Easter Sunday is still typically spent with family, but Easter Monday is when Italians – especially younger Italians hang out with their friends.

Some traditional Italian dishes for Easter are:

- **abbacchio** (lamb prepared in Roman cuisine style) Eating lamb at Easter has a religious meaning commemorating the [Death and Resurrection of Jesus](#).
- **capretto** (goat)
- **arciofe alla romana** (artichokes Roman style)
- **cappello del prete** (a variety of salume typical of Parma and Piacenza)
- **casatiello** Neapolitan savory bread containing cheese, sausage, salami, hard-boiled eggs)
- **colomba di Pasqua** (traditional Easter sweet bread in shape of a dove)
- **pastiera** (Neapolitan grain and ricotta pie flavored with orange flower water)
- **penia** (a sweet bread with rural origins)
- **pizza di Pasqua** (a leavened savory cake with cheese, wheat flour, pecorino and parmesan cheeses)
- **pinza Pasquale** (from Trieste, a sweet bread with three-point cross on top)
- **pizzelle** (Italian waffle-like cookies)
- **uova di cioccolato** (chocolate eggs, usually hollow in the center and containing a "surprise")
- **marzipan lamb-shaped sweets** (in Sicily)

Recipes of special foods prepared for this holiday

Special greetings Italians use for Easter:

- Auguro a tutti voi una buona Pasqua
- Buona Pasqua, amico mio! (to a man)
- Buona Pasqua, amica mia! (to a woman)
- Buona Pasqua a tutti!
- Buona Pasqua a te e famiglia! (informal)
- Buona Pasqua a Lei e alla Sua famiglia! (formal)
- Buona Pasqua a voi e alla vostra famiglia! (plural)
- Ti auguro una serena e buona Pasqua! (informal)
- Le auguro una serena e buona Pasqua! (formal)

Special Italian vocabulary, phrases, sayings connected with this holiday

- "Natale con i tuoi, a Pasqua con chi vuoi."
[il coniglietto](#)—bunny rabbit
- [la crocifissione](#)—Crucifixion

- [la pace](#)—peace
- [la Pasquetta](#)—Easter Monday
- [la primavera](#)—spring
- [la resurrezione](#)—Resurrection
- [la settimana santa](#)—Holy Week
- [l'Ultima Cena](#)—Last Supper
- [le uova](#)—eggs
- [Venerdì Santo](#)—Holy Friday

Unique traditions:

- Children and loved ones receive over-sized hollow chocolate eggs ([uova di Pasqua](#)) with a surprise inside. These come in all sizes, shapes, and colors and are displayed in store windows throughout the city.
- Florence: [La festa del carro](#) tradition started in 1096, commemorating the return of a Florentine knight who raised the Holy Cross banner in Jerusalem during the Crusades. For his bravery, he received pieces of flint from the Holy Sepulcher of Christ. Upon his return to Florence, these stones were used to light the Easter Vigil sacred fire and then ported around the streets of Florence. Today Florentines commemorate this event on Easter Sunday with a procession during which a 30-foot-tall antique cart is pulled by a team of white oxen during a parade of 150 soldiers, musicians and others dressed in 15th-century costumes. Once the parade reaches Piazza del Duomo, a dove-shaped rocket ([La Colombina](#)) holding an olive branch is shot towards a cart loaded with fireworks, setting off the boom ([scoppio](#)). This yearly event is supposed to guarantee a good harvest, stable civic life, and thriving business.
- Rome: On Good Friday thousands of people gather in Saint Peter's Basilica to listen to the Pope's mass at 5 pm. After that the Pope starts his walk followed by thousands of people carrying torches to remember Christ's [Via Crucis](#). The procession starts at the Palatine Hill, makes 14 stops along the way to remember the walk of Christ, prays at each stop, and ends at the Colosseum.
- Tredozio: On Easter Monday the [Palio dell'Uovo](#) is a competition where eggs are the stars of the games.
- Enna: Religious rites dating back to the Spanish domination (fifteenth through seventeenth century) take place in this Sicilian town. On Good Friday, the different religious confraternities gather around the main church and over 2,000 friars wearing ancient costumes silently parade through the streets of the city. On Easter Sunday, the Paci ceremony takes place: the statue of the Virgin and that of Jesus Christ are first taken to the main square and then into the church where they stay for a week.
- Merano: The [Corse Rusticane](#) are fascinating races that are conducted there with a special breed of horses famous for their blonde manes ridden by youths wearing the local costumes of their towns. Before the race, the participants parade through the streets of the town followed by a band and folk-dance groups.

- Barano d'Ischia: On Easter Monday the ['Ndrezzata](#) takes place—a dance which revives the fights against the Saracens.
- Carovigno: On the Saturday before Easter is a procession dedicated to the Madonna del Belvedere during which the ['Nzeghe](#) contest takes place: banners must be hurled as far as possible.
- Province of Ascoli Piceno: The [Cavallo di fuoco](#) (Fiery Horse) is an historical reenactment which takes place in the city of Ripatransone. It is a fireworks show, which traditionally occurs eight days after [Easter](#).
- Trapani, Sicily: The [Processione dei Misteri di Trapani](#) or the Procession of the Mysteries of Trapani is a day-long passion procession featuring twenty floats of lifelike sculptures made of wood, canvas, and glue. These sculptures are of individual scenes of the events of the Passion which are reenacted on the town square. They are amongst the oldest continuously running religious events in Europe since Easter of 1612. The plays run for at least 16 continuous hours, but sometimes well beyond 24 hours.
- Courmayeur, Val d'Aosta: on Easter Monday the [Foire de la Paquerette](#) is celebrated. The streets are overflowing with stalls displaying works of sculpture and carvings of Aosta Valley craftsmanship, lace, handmade garments, and traditional products.

Bormio, Valtellina: [The Pasquali](#) parade takes place on Easter Sunday. Dressed in traditional costumes the inhabitants carry palanquin style floats on their shoulders through the streets of the town center.

- Prizzi, Palermo province, Sicily: The [Ballo dei Diavoli](#), the devils dance, takes place on Easter morning. Devils dressed in red, escorted by death, wearing yellow costumes, harass passers-by and do their best to prevent the statue of the risen Christ and the statue of the Madonna, which are being paraded through the streets, from meeting. A group of “angels” intervenes to drive them away with the sound of bells ringing throughout the town. During the festival, [cannatedde](#), the typical dessert made of short crust pastry and hard-boiled egg are distributed.
- Adrano, Catania province, Sicily: On Easter Sunday, a satanic delegation invades the town with the [Diavulazzi 'i Pasqua](#), a tradition that has been ongoing since the eighteenth century and celebrates the triumph of good over evil.
- San Fratello, Messina province, Sicily: The devils of the Feast of the Jews, [Festa dei Giudei](#), , are also dressed in red and yellow, intent on disturbing the procession that commemorates Christ. The faithful intervene to prevent them from succeeding by engaging in a duel with the devils.
- Chieti in the province of Abruzzo: The procession in this town is believed to be the oldest Good Friday procession in Italy. It is very moving with Secchi's "Miserere" played by 100 violins.

- Montefalco and Gualdo Tadino in Umbria: These and other towns hold live passion plays during the night of Good Friday. Others put on plays acting out the stations of the Cross.
- Hill towns in Umbria such as Orvieto and Assisi: They hold beautiful torchlight processions
- Sulmona in province of Abruzzo: This town celebrates Easter Sunday with **Madonna che scappa in Piazza** (Madonna running in the square). People dress in green and white—colors of peace, hope, and resurrection—and gather in the main piazza. The woman playing the Virgin Mary is dressed in black. As she moves to the fountain, doves are released, and the woman is suddenly dressed in green. Music and feasting follow.

My family celebrates this holiday but maybe not in the traditional Italian way although I am sure that many Italian American families still enjoy Easter the way their Italian ancestors did in some fashion. Most probably they prepare some of the traditional Italian Easter dishes.

It would be very easy to incorporate some of these Italian Easter traditions in our lodges to foster interest in Italian culture, heritage, and language. These could be activities that appeal to different age levels (children, young adults, other members, families, specific interest groups).

Some ideas:

- Easter prayers in Italian
- Stations of the cross in Italian
- Preparing traditional pastries
- Exchanging chocolate Easter eggs with a surprise inside (sold at Italian food stores)
- Learning Italian words for the days of Holy Week
- Learning names of spring flowers
- Sponsoring a Pasquetta Picnic on the Monday after Easter
- Children's Easter egg hunt with Italian clues