



more extroverted way partying all night, playing cards and even clubbing.

✓ Poker and black jack are the most common games played, and some people even visit the casinos, where there are particular offers and games for the night. If you are invited to a house where card games are played, you don't need to participate in the game. You can comment on the game, watch the festive shows on the TV, or just mingle with the rest of people who won't be playing.

✓ If you are invited to the New Year Eve party or celebration, you will definitely need to bring something to the hosts; you can either buy a gift, or bring a nice wine or champagne. In any case, do not bring kourampiedes and melomakarona or vasilopita, because these are the sweets offered by the host. Anything else is pretty much accepted; in some cases when the host is organizing dinner as well you can bring some food – make sure you ask the host first.

✓ Usually there is no dress code for the New Year's Eve and it depends on the house you are visiting and the composition of the guests, but Greeks tend to dress up a little on that night.

✓ Many Greeks organize parties outside the houses, in bars or restaurants, while other visit musical stages and celebrate there; during the festive days prices are higher due to Table d'hrte, an additional rate added to the regular prices of the club or stage.

Customs of the New Year

✓ Although the most common New Year's custom for the Greeks is Vassilopita with the coin, there are more customs for this important day. After midnight, when the New Year has come, Greeks break a pomegranate on the ground in the house (usually in a bag because the pomegranate juice and seeds make a mess), as this fruit is associated with luck and prosperity.

✓ If people celebrate New Year's Eve outside their houses, when they come back they have to enter the house on the right foot, because this is supposed to bring good luck to the household.

✓ When the year changes at midnight, Greeks turn the lights off and turn them

on again a few seconds later; this is a move that symbolizes the new beginning. They also open a bottle of champagne, which is a relatively new custom for that night.

✓ On New Year's Eve and first day, there is no particular food that has to be prepared, although the table should be rich and full – prosperity is always an issue for the coming year and a full dinner

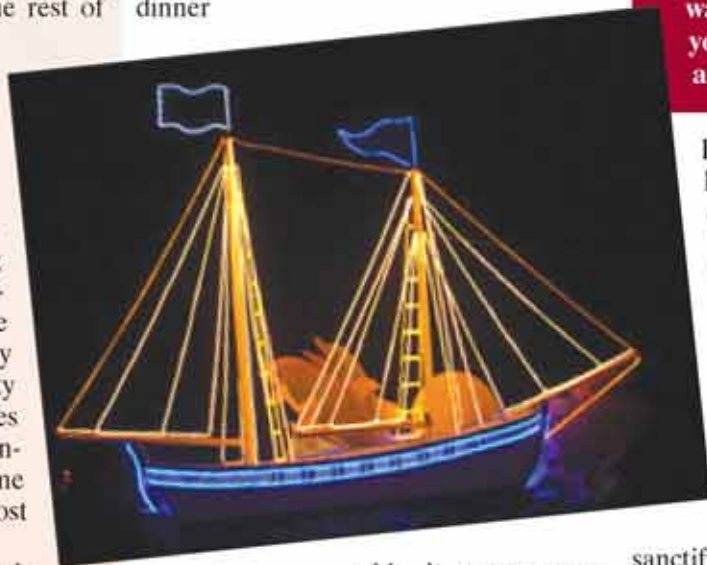


table is synonymous to good fortune and richness for the household.

✓ In the mainland and Cyclades islands, Greeks prepare a plate with several goods, including fruits, honey, seeds (almonds and walnuts) and sweets and eat from it on the first day of the Year.

The End of Christmas Holidays and Celebrations

✓ The Greek Christmas Holidays end with the Epiphany on January 6th. The

Melomakarona (Greek Christmas Cookies)

INGREDIENTS

2 cups oil - 1 cup sugar - 1 cup orange juice
 1 cup fine semolina - 1 kilo soft flour
 1 ½ teaspoons baking soda - Lemon and Orange zest
 Simple syrup: (In a pot, mix together 1 cup each of water, honey and sugar and bring to boil while stirring constantly.) - Crushed walnuts
 Preheat oven to 200c

Beat oil well with mixer, then add the sugar, both zests, orange juice, semolina, and then, a little at a time, the flour mixed with the baking soda.

Form the dough into small shapes, as the pastries will get quite big while baking. Make sure the oven is hot before baking, otherwise the pastries will flatten. Bake for about 30 minutes until pastries are firm and golden brown.

When completely cooled, arrange in rows in a pan and pour warm syrup over them. Sprinkle with crushed walnuts.

Kalikantzaroi, The Greek Christmas Sprites



Kalikantzaroi enjoy lollygagging around in places like oil vats, frying pans, oily pots and dishes, and they really get a kick out of soiling food with their filthy fingernails and leaving their excrement all over the place. About the only good thing that can be said about these nasty pests is that they never steal anything - oh, but what a mess!

Kalikantzaroi, their history

Their name Kalikantzaros (singular of Kalikantzaroi) comes from the adjective, kalos, meaning good, and kantharos, the word for beetle. The beginning of the myth regarding the Christmas Sprites can be found in ancient times. The people of that time believed that when the souls in Hades found the door open they would come up to our world and make the rounds among people without any restrictions.

Much later the Byzantines celebrated with music, song and masquerading. Because the people hid their faces they were shameless and behaved boldly. They would bother people on the street, and go into the homes uninvited, pestering the people by continuously asking for sausages and sweets. The homeowners would slam the doors and shut the windows, but the persistent masqueraders would always find a point of entry - like coming down the chimney.

All this activity would occur during the 12 days of Christmas and on the Epiphany. Then, after the big sanctification all would become calm again as the people settled back down into their normal routine.

Kalikantzaroi disappear during the celebration of the lights, after the waters are blessed by the priests. As those pesky little creatures depart, you can hear them saying: "Leave we shall, because the crazy priest has arrived with his incense burner and his holy water sprinkler . . ."

Epiphany is associated with the blessing of the waters and can be quite spectacular in some towns.

✓ Greece is a country much related to the sea, which has been the main source of income for many thousand years. It is, thus, normal that the beautiful blue sea has its special place in the hearts of the Greeks, who gather on the 6th of January at ports, beaches, banks of rivers and lakes, or even fountains to

sanctify the waters to bring them good trips in calm seas, health and prosperity.

✓ When the Good comes, the Evil has to leave and hide in the dark where it keeps living and grows based on its evilness. This is what happens with the Kalikantzaroi, the little black, hairy monsters that come up on earth a little before Christmas, but are forced to go down to the bowels of the Earth, before the sanctification on the Epiphany day. The legend of Kalikantzaroi is a very common legend in Greece, and these creatures are associated with everything evil and bad.



Kourabiedes

Greek Christmas Cookies

INGREDIENTS:

2 kilos soft flour
 1 kilo butter
 300 grams powdered sugar
 300 grams crushed roasted almonds
 1 small glass cognac
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 Rosewater
 Preheat oven to medium (175c).

• Whiten the butter by beating by hand for ½ hour. Add the sugar, cognac, almonds and finally the flour, mixed with the baking soda. Continue to beat until all ingredients are well mixed.

• Mold into the familiar shapes of the kourambiethes and place on a cookie sheet. Bake for 20 minutes until golden. Remove from oven and immediately sprinkle with rosewater, then roll in the powder sugar.