
A Christmas message from ESCCA

Dear colleagues and friends,

With this email ESCCA would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

We hope that 2017 will be a fulfilling year bringing you health, peace, prosperity and success!

We also hope to see you all at the ESCCA 2017 Conference. Have you saved the date? We'll convene from Sunday 24 – Wednesday 27 September in Thessaloniki. You can find more information on www.escca.eu/greece2017.

Finally, I'd like to share with you how Christmas is traditionally celebrated in Greece. May our lighted little boats and Christmas carols also enlighten your lives and your smiles!

Warm regards,

Katherina Psarra
ESCCA President

Christmas in Greece

Usually they are not white, our Christmases, but there are lights everywhere, shops competing for the best, extraordinarily imagined Christmas decoration and lighted Christmas trees that can be seen throughout cities and villages. Unique in Greece during these holidays, in addition to numerous Christmas trees, are the traditional little boats decorated with lights. Not so long ago young children used to carry them around when going from door to door on Christmas Eve to sing Christmas carols. Why a decorated boat instead of a tree? Where is this tradition coming from? Is it because of the eternal love of the Greeks for the sea? Is it because of so many Greeks actually made a living from whatever the sea had to offer? Or is it because the patron saint of the sea is Aghios Nikolaos (Saint Nicolas) who is celebrated on December 6th? No matter the reason, nowadays a lot of lighted little boats can be seen around the decorated squares in Greece reminding Greeks of their unique tradition in addition of course to Christmas trees.



On the eves of Christmas, New Year's Eve, and "Foton" (lights) or Epiphany Day (on the January 6th), groups of children of all ages, sometimes wearing Santa Claus hats or carrying and hitting the traditional, iron-made, primitive music instruments called "triangles", sing carols. They walk through the neighbourhoods knocking on doors, asking the owner of the house to give them permission to sing the carols.

On Christmas Eve they sing "In this house where we have come we wish the owner to live a thousand years and his house never to fall apart". Or on New Year's Eve "Aghios Vasilis" (the Greek Santa Claus) is coming from Caesarea, he is bringing us gifts and..." And what do they get in return? In the old days, the housewife used to share her freshly baked traditional Christmas sweets "kourampiedes" and "melomakarona", but nowadays most people give mainly money to the singing kids.



During these days, all around the streets, shops and houses, people can hear the echo of Christmas carols. There must be very few Greek people who never walked as kids endlessly around the streets singing Christmas carols, and very few houses all over Greece must exist which do not bake or buy from pastry shops quantities of kourampiedes and melomakarona to last them throughout the holiday season.

And who brings the gifts for the kids in Greece? The Greek version of Santa Claus. Aghios Vassilis, is a Greek orthodox wise Saint from Asia Minor, who wears the same traditional Santa Claus red costume. He places the gifts under the tree in the night of New Year's Eve. But no milk and cookies for the Greek Santa Claus. The first day of the year is full of surprises, joy and laughter for all the kids no matter where they live.

Christmas in Athens

Usually they are not white, our Christmases, but there are lights everywhere, shops competing for the best, extraordinarily imagined Christmas decoration and lighted Christmas trees that can be seen throughout the city in all neighbourhoods. Unique in Athens during these holidays, in addition to numerous Christmas trees, are the traditional little boats decorated with lights. Not so long ago young children used to carry them around when going from door to door on Christmas Eve to sing Christmas carols. Why a decorated boat instead of a tree? Where is this tradition coming from? Is it because of the eternal love of the Greeks for the sea? Is it because of so many Greeks actually made a living from whatever the sea had to offer? Or is it because the patron saint of the sea is Aghios Nikolaos (Saint Nicolas) who is celebrated on December 6th? No matter what, nowadays a lot of lighted little boats can be seen around the decorated squares in Athens reminding Greeks of their unique tradition in addition of course to Christmas trees.



On the eves of Christmas, New Year's day, and "Foton" (lights) or Epiphany Day (on the January 6th), groups of children of all ages, sometimes wearing Santa Claus hats or carrying and hitting the traditional, iron-made, primitive music instruments called "triangles", are singing carols. They walk through the neighbourhoods knocking on doors, asking from the owner of the house to give them permission to sing the carols.

On Christmas Eve they sing "In this house where we have come we wish the owner to live a thousand years and his house never to fall apart". Or on New Year's Eve "Aghios Vasilis" (the Greek Santa Claus) is coming from Caesarea, he is bringing us gifts and..." And what do they get in return? In the old days, the housewife used to share her freshly baked traditional Christmas sweets "kourampiedes" and "melomakarona", but nowadays most people give mainly money to the singing kids.



During these days, all around the streets, shops and houses, people can hear the echo of Christmas carols. There must be very few Greek people who never walked as kids endlessly around the streets singing Christmas carols, and very few houses all over Greece must exist which do not bake or buy from pastry shops quantities of *kourampiedes* and *melomakarona* to last them throughout the holiday season.

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On New Year's Eve a big concert takes place on Syntagma square in the centre of Athens, in front of the Parliament. From there, people can stroll to the old part of the city under the Acropolis.

On January 6th, towards the end of the festive days, according to Greek Orthodox religion the waters are sanctified. In Athens this ceremony takes place in the big fountain by the city Cathedral, but also in all the nearby ports like Piraeus. There, a wooden cross is thrown into the water and many courageous men jump into the sea to grab the cross and bring it back to the shore. It is considered a big blessing for the winner and it is a great attraction for all Greeks, another opportunity to be again outdoors, by the sea.