

Polish Easter Traditions

Author: [Marta Jazowska](#)

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Poland has a series of unique rituals connected to Easter, ranging from joyful to spiritual, and of course always including plenty of homemade delicacies.

Easter in Poland is celebrated according to the Western Roman Catholic calendar. Easter Sunday falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring. Rites and practices are therefore marked by Christianity, but still remain strongly influenced by pagan traditions. It is usual for both modern and conservative families to partake in the celebrations, regardless of what their religious beliefs may be.



Women carrying hand-made 'palms' to be blessed in church on Palm Sunday, photo: Marek Maliszewski / Reporter / East News

The first sign of approaching Easter in Poland is a large number of branches and dried flowers being brought to church. One week before Easter, Palm Sunday (in Polish *niedziela palmowa*) takes place. According to Catholic tradition, the day marks the entrance of Jesus in Jerusalem. Since palm trees are rare in Poland – [although there is one known specimen](#) – churchgoers often bring pussy willows or 'palms' made of colourful woven dried branches.



Ornamental representation of the tomb of Christ, photo: Anatol Chomicz / Forum

On the Saturday before Easter Sunday, Poles paint hard-boiled eggs (called [pisanki](#)). Some use store-brought kits which make the colouring and decorating easier, others continue to make dyes the traditional way – with boiled onion skins. Egg painting is encountered in several other Slavic cultures, and is thought to date back to talismanic pagan rituals that are over 5000 years old.

Another Saturday activity is [the preparation of Easter baskets](#). Lined with a white linen or lace napkin and decorated with sprigs of boxwood (*bukszpan*), the baskets contain a sampling of Easter foods: pisanki, a piece of sausage or ham, salt and pepper, bread, a piece of cake and an Easter Lamb made of sugar or even plastic. They are brought to church to be blessed.



Traditional Polish Easter meal, photo: Wojciech Krajnik / Forum

On the most important day, Easter Sunday, some go to church at 6am for the Resurrection mass – a ceremonial service and procession. Homes come alive with families who gather to eat breakfast. Before the meal, in much the same way as for Christmas with the sharing of the *oplatek* (Christmas wafer), people share wedges of the blessed Easter eggs from the basket. They exchange wishes and a *Wesołego Alleluja* (Joyful Hallelujah).

The breakfast is dominated by cold dishes and is a feast for meat lovers: ham, sausage, roast meats, *pâté* (*paszтет*), eggs, horseradish relish, bread. [Easter breakfast is so decadent that it has to be considered a day-off from the Spring diet.](#)



Babka, a sweet yeast cake, photo: Piotr Wojnarowski / Forum

What follows is a frenzy of Easter cakes: a tall, round 15-yolk sweet yeast cake with a hole in the middle ([babka](#)) that can be compared to the American election cake; *mazurek*, a cake with a fat layer of icing, decorated with dried fruit, walnuts, almonds, roasted seeds; or [sernik](#), a classic Polish cheesecake.

[Śmigus-Dyngus: Poland's National Water Fight Day](#)

A good piece of advice: beware of Easter Monday in Poland! Although this advice might seem strange, you really should take it to heart, cause otherwise... you'll get soaked! The tradition of Śmigus-Dyngus is still going strong in Poland.

Author: Marta Jazowska, edited by LB, 11 Mar 2014