

# Discovering Philippine Traditions: 7 Filipino Holiday Customs

## *Sprinkling a Little Philippine Culture into the Holidays*

Despite having lived in the USA for over 35 years, my first generation Filipino parents continue to practice a slew of Philippine customs and traditions. They have unconsciously and consciously infused their parenting with Philippine culture & distinctive heritage. Here are the top 7 Filipino Holiday Customs that forever remain embedded in my memories. Some have religious connections while others are clearly superstitious. As a child, I just remember how fun it was to celebrate the holidays.

### **1. The Parol**

The Parol is uniquely Filipino. In its more basic forms, the parol is a lantern shaped like a star. It symbolizes the star that the 3 wise men followed to reach the stable where Jesus was born. Today, it has evolved into more ornate forms decorated with multicolored lights, flashing patterns and added sparkle. Once parols are seen going up in public places, it is apparent that the Christmas Season is upon us.

### **2. 9 day Novena, Simbang Gabi**

Simbang Gabi or "Night Mass" is a tradition that gets its roots from the Spaniards who had settled & had contributed to the Philippine culture. The Spanish version is called "Misa de Gallo."

The novena of masses begin 9 days before Christmas day in various parishes. Usually, these masses are celebrated either early morning or in the evening. Prior to the mass starting, a simple food offering, flowers, statues of Saints, and/or children depicting the Holy Family, shepherds, Maggi and angels parade towards the altar in remembrance and honor of the Nativity.

### **3. Queso de Bola**

The term "queso de bola" refers to a large ball of yellow cheese wrapped in thick red wax. It is a common snack eaten by Filipinos during the holidays coupled with rolls of bread or pan de sal. My mom always made sure we had a Queso de Bola during Christmas and would slice us pieces

### **4. Round Fruits**

Round fruits are the recommended items to be placed on the table on New Year's Eve. It symbolizes a bountiful & fruitful future in the upcoming year and helps to make sure that the home always have plenty of food throughout the year. Failure to place it on one's table may bring misfortune into that household.

### **5. Eat 12 Grapes**

Before the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, all the Filipino mothers in our circle of friends would tell the children, "Go eat your 12 grapes!" By eating 12

grapes on New Year's Eve, the eater would be sealing their fate for the upcoming year with good fortune.

## **6. Money in Your Pockets**

My parents made sure that everyone in our family had money in our pockets on New Year's Eve, even if it was just a few coins. We were instructed to jingle our pockets with coins as the clock strikes the midnight hour. This was another way of bringing good luck & wealth into the new year.

## **7. Throwing Money**

I clearly remember the eager anticipation of midnight on New Year's because of the money throwing. The adults gather the children together in a centralized area, i.e. the living room. As soon as it is midnight, the adults throw & scatter coins in the air for the children to pick up. Not only is it amusing to watch the children crawl for the coins, it also is good luck to all those involved.

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