

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

**NIKOLAUSABEND—NICHOLAS EVE  
KRAMPUSNACHT—KRAMPUS NIGHT  
der 5. Dezember**

**Sitten und Bräuche (customs and traditions)**

In the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany's Rhineland, the sweets that “good” children find in their shoes on December 6 often include spice cookies known as *Speculaas* (Dutch), *Speculoos* (Flemish), or *Spekulatius* (German). Since these cookies are often made in the shape of St. Nicholas, some sources say their name comes from *speculator*, a Latin word meaning “overseer” or “bishop.” Other sources think their name is derived from *speculum*, the Latin word for “mirror,” because the cookies are shaped in carved wooden molds or “boards” that imprint a mirror-image of the mold's design on the top surface of each cookie.

Historically these cookies have been made in many shapes besides that of St. Nicholas: men and women in traditional costumes, animals, flowers, snowflakes, sailing ships, a knight on a horse, a woman sitting at a spinning wheel. One especially popular shape is the windmill, a familiar feature of the Dutch, Belgian, and north German landscape. So many cookies are made in this shape that *Spekulatius* cookies are often referred to, generically, as “windmill cookies.”

Redolent of cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, and cloves, these crisp, buttery, golden-brown cookies are cousins of other gingerbread-type cookies made throughout Europe from Scandinavia to Italy, from France to Russia. (However, *Spekulatius* cookies should not be confused with *Springerle* – white, anise-flavored cookies, with designs printed by a different type of cookie mold, which originated in Swabia and belong to the culinary traditions of southern Germany, Alsace, and parts of Bohemia and Switzerland.)

## SPEKULATIUS COOKIES: A SPECIAL TREAT FOR ST. NICHOLAS DAY



Related to the *Printe*, with regard to the depiction of scenes and people, is the “*Spekulatius*”. The term is derived from Latin – *speculum* means mirror or mirror image. Originally, the *Spekulatius* is a Dutch pastry – at least the oldest provable recipe is over 200 years old and comes from Amsterdam. Meanwhile, however, the *Spekulatius* is an indispensable part of the pre-Christmas time (which, as far as the *Spekulatius* is concerned, begins as early as October . . .).

Taste-wise, the *Spekulatius* differs considerably from the *Printe*, the reason being that its dough is not like the one for ginger bread or honey cake but a sponge mixture seasoned with the spices of Christmas. The preparation of the dough is simple – its shaping in the molds is what creates the difficulties (*Spekulatius* molds, by the way, can be found on many Christmas markets and often also in the boutique sections of furniture or home decorating stores).