



palate pleasures

Christmas comes but once a year ...

Once we hit adulthood, most of us don't care for it to occur any more than this! Without the wonder and promise of childhood to add sparkle, it's easy to get bogged down in the negative when it comes to this time of the year – trolley wars at the supermarket, parking space rage, gritting our teeth at the in-laws, hangovers, sunburn, tantrums, etc. etc.

There's an almost apocalyptic urgency to get things done by Christmas Eve, when in fact there is really just one day where the world sort of stops – Boxing Day for the most part becoming a day of boringly normal trading hours.

But still nevertheless, many of us panic and start to resent the various tasks we feel we need to complete, as well as the people around us – usually our nearest and dearest!

In Australia Christmas signifies the start of the holiday season – schools and universities are out for the count of January and office workers take their annual leave. The sun shines, the cicadas roar in a constant and sometimes deafening chorus, the beaches are crowded and there's always a Barbie going on somewhere.

For someone who comes from a freezing northern hemisphere Christmas past, this is an extreme juxtaposition – albeit not an unwelcome one. Although Christmas in Canada provides one with a typical winter wonderland scenario – sled rides, snowmen, snowball fights, comfort food with lots of gravy and mash, weather conducive to 'touque' wearing (I believe Aussies call these 'beanies'), the Aussie version engenders a certain casualness (I think it's called 'sunshine') – which induces a freedom to partake in the outdoors that you just don't get in wintery northern climes.

In this country we seem to be still unsure of the correct protocol for the season.

Our northern European heritage has long provoked a certain nostalgia for Frosty, Rudolf, and the typical fir trees we adorn with baubles and fake snow. With this comes a bit of yearning for 'the old country', and subsequently there are those who never venture to the fishmonger to supply for the day.

But our climate has inadvertently paved the way for a growing acceptance of a departure from the culinary norm and led us outside to the Barbie and away from the oven. Let's face it – a hot and traditional Christmas dinner with all the trimmings just doesn't hold quite the same appeal in 30°C heat ...

But we have to ask ourselves (setting aside sentimentality for a second) – does the time-honoured idea of white Christmas with turkey and pudding somehow trump the feasting on of juicy king prawns, oysters (at their seasonal best), delicious salads, mangoes, cherries, and all the other great stuff readily available and frequently utilised for a typical Aussie Christmas?

There's no right or wrong answer here – except that Christmas and the holiday season are what you make of them, wherever you happen to be around the world. In this country we have even more freedom to utilise the bounties of our climate, to add to our enjoyment of the season. We can still embody tradition and the ancient symbols, but we can also go for a surf on Christmas morn, or float in the pool sipping a cocktail.

Some of us don't celebrate – and that's okay too. But if you do, I would say the only requirements are people you care about (even just one, or a phone call if necessary!), food and drink that you enjoy, and just taking the time to enjoy the interlude – in between the next onslaught of Boxing day, NYE and Resolutions anew – that this one day creates.

