



Christmas Down Under



Australia's festive traditions may be a little different to the UK but they are no less special, writes *Karen Bleakley*

You're more likely to see a sandy snowman in Australia

We've spent four Christmases in Australia as permanent residents. Celebrating in the sun is such a different experience and we've tried our best to embrace it.

We had lots of traditions in the UK. Alternate years we'd spend Christmas with my family in Lincolnshire. There was always a jolly pre-Christmas meet up with my aunts, uncles, cousins and extended family.

Christmas Eve night would mean one of my mum's buffet dinners with home-cooked ham and an endless supply of sausage rolls. On Christmas morning, we'd grab our hats and gloves and step outside to find the canal frozen and we'd watch the mist from our breath as we walked their dog along the riverbank.



overeating stodgy food isn't as appealing in the sun and we gather under the air conditioning instead of by the fire. Now we spend time in the pool instead of watching the telly or rushing around.

Christmas in Australia means sipping iced coffee while sitting on a blanket with friends enjoying the warm evening air while listening to carol singers or watching an outdoor movie at a park with

depending on his shifts. We always cook a turkey on one of the days and tend to cook barbeques the rest of the time. We've embraced the Aussie tradition of the Christmas 'pav' (pavlova), although we also have Christmas pudding too.

We video chat our families and it can feel bittersweet to know they are all together on the opposite side of the world, but seeing them on video always helps.

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We'd open presents while eating chocolates in between throwing logs on the fire and watching Noel Edmonds on TV. Then we'd listen to my mum's beloved Johnny Mathis Christmas CD while stuffing ourselves with turkey.

On the years we were at my in-laws for Christmas, it was a similar thing with lots of family get-togethers, plenty of chilly walks by the beach, lots of TV and too many tins of Roses...

Christmas in the UK was lovely, but it often felt hectic and we always over indulged.

Christmas in Australia is the total opposite. Tins of chocolate melt the moment they are out of the fridge,

a big tub of popcorn (can of mozzie spray in hand!) It means spending the evening at the beach under Moreton Bay fig trees decked with twinkling fairy lights as we attend the local Christmas festival and then watching the fireworks light up Moreton Island over the bay.

It means putting our Christmas tree up early because our kids' school breaks up for summer in November and it feels natural to have the tree up when the school year is done.

It's an amazing atmosphere at the beach on Christmas morning, but we love to spend the big day at home in our pool. My husband Matt usually works a lot over the holidays, so we adapt our plans

We can never recreate a UK Christmas over here so we've embraced the opportunities to celebrate in different ways. Our kids have only known Christmas in Australia as they were young when we moved. Instead of frozen canals, winter scarves and roasting chestnuts on the fire, to them Christmas memories are of icy poles, beach barbeques, body boarding and water fights. It's two very different ways to celebrate, but to me they are both pretty special. 🇺🇸

■ **Karen Bleakley helps families take the stress out of moving to Australia. Visit her website to find out more: www.SmartStepstoAustralia.com.**