

International Christmas

Cambodia

Cambodia is a Buddhist nation but Cambodians overseas enjoy the celebrations and holiday atmosphere of this Christian celebration.

Koke and Sokha Leng take holidays at Christmas and spend Christmas Day with Koke's parents in Auckland. It is a chance for them to meet up with Koke's sister, who lives in Dunedin.



“Cambodia has been cut off from the rest of the world by war but now it has opened up, Christmas may catch on, with influences from relatives in places like the United States and New Zealand. At present, there are small Christmas displays in the stores and each year a Christmas album is put out by Cambodian singers and these are very popular. People like it because it makes them feel happy. People are starting to say “merry Christmas,” and it is likely that the children will catch on to it and pull the adults in. It is quite different in Vietnam, which is 95% Christian.”



China

Ronnie Ma, 23, from Shanghai: “I first came to New Zealand to do a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in design study here and now I am working in Papakura. 20 years ago nobody even used the word Christmas in China, not because we are ignorant, but because not many Chinese people are Christian. On 25th Dec, we still have to go to school and do everything as normal but after school, some young people will get together and go out and have fun. In my mind, young people celebrate Christmas just for fun, it is not as serious as we celebrate New Years and Spring Festival when we buy foods, new clothes and clean the house to get ready for the big celebrations. I usually spend November till February in China, but the one time I stayed in NZ I was amazed to see all the shops closed at Christmas. In China the shops are never closed during any holidays. The most exiting day for me here in New Zealand is Boxing Day because of all the sales! In China we don't have Boxing Day, after 25th December everything is back to normal with school and work and waiting for the New Year's holiday to come.”

Africa

The Philips Family, Pukekohe Ros grew up in Zimbabwe and met Neville while at university in South Africa. They now live in Pukekohe with their two daughters Michelle (9) and Nicola (6). Christmas in southern Africa was a big family event, very hot, with lots of food, beer and ‘Buck's Fizz’ (Champagne and orange juice).



Ros remembers the ringing of the bells for midnight mass and the excitement of overseas family visiting. For Neville's family Christmas also involved the complete novelty of them cleaning mountains of dishes as the maid was on leave. “Here in New Zealand we enjoy catching up with friends and family during the holidays. Decorating the tree is a big family event and on Christmas Eve we leave a can of Coke, some biscuits, a bucket of water and some carrots outside. In the morning when there is only an empty bucket outside and presents under the tree we know that Santa and the reindeers were here. We also really enjoy going for a drive to watch the various light displays around the area as Christmas lights was something that we certainly didn't have back in Africa.”

Greece

Greek families in New Zealand follow the same traditions at Christmas as other European Christians, beginning with attending a Christmas Eve church service. On Christmas Day there is a big family celebration with huge amounts of beautiful food, much fun and spoiling of the children. Preparations take place for days ahead, with women preparing traditional fare like the Christmas sweets “kourabiedhes” and “melomakarana”, to serve with the usual Kiwi favourites. Friends and family travel from far away to be together at Christmas and the day is busy, with visitors dropping in to receive warm hospitality and all they can eat and drink, while the host family in turn visits as many friends and relatives they can. Sending cards for Christmas is not as important as seeing as many people as possible to share the joy of the day. Wonderful though a Greek Christmas is, the celebration takes second place to Easter in importance.

