

respite during the slower trading months.

But what of Christmas down under, occurring as it does in early summer. Is it not odd to see traditional winter celebrations imposed by early settlers upon warm, sunny days? Christmas cards depicting robins on snow-covered mailboxes? Rugged-up Carolers sipping hot toddies?

Not at all ... if that's what you like. Whether you prefer a traditional roast meal or a barbecue outside, a formal dinner or informal brunch, a church service to celebrate the birth of Christ or a walk along the beach, a large, rowdy family affair or a quiet day indulging your favourite pastimes, is entirely up to you.

And rather than decrying its commercialism, I prefer to embrace it for the wealth it provides and the jobs it creates. It would be a mean-spirited Scrooge who begrudged another his income during the Season of Goodwill. Do some people overstretch themselves financially? Sadly, yes. But the truth is that nobody forces them to do so. Beautiful doesn't have to be big and bold. It never did.

Yes, the Santa sleepwear is tacky. Yes, the reindeer antlers are tragic on anyone old enough to pay full price at the pictures and Michael Jackson's I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus (I really did!) drives me nuts, too. But it all vanishes in comparison with the beauty of a Christmas tree lit up in the darkness, or the enrapturing melodies of some of the most beautiful music ever written.

Not to mention the face of the little one who gazes upon the simplicity of the nativity scene in the stable where the celebration of Christmas, as we know it today, all began.

May Father Christmas be good to you all.

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