

Memories of Christmas Around the World

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One year we were staying with a man who would otherwise been alone in his old house without a companion, shortly before his health and circumstances required its sale.

We returned from the Christmas Eve midnight Service in the Shropshire church precious to my family. When he returned from the freezer with an enormous turkey, he suggested it could be cooked later in the day. I was tempted to take part off with a chain saw for defrosting and cooking in time.

One year when our doctor daughter was in Sydney, we met extended family for Christmas dinner in the heat on Bondi beach. Another special Christmas was with all our descendants in the south west of Sri Lanka, shortly before a terrorist attack on a church. The Service in the Christian church in Galle was held in three languages; none was English.

This year, one of our children hopes to welcome us close to Sussex, assuming restrictions permit.

In their later years my parents stopped being with us all together. They preferred to avoid feasting. After the Christmas Service, they would take a picnic to a local hill, sitting outside their car if the weather was dry.

My aunt, a distinguished hospital consultant in Cambridge, would always choose to be on duty on Christmas Day, recognising that especially in obstetrics there were no days or nights without activity.

I join readers in thinking of everyone whose work or voluntary or family responsibilities calls them to support others at Christmas. Thank you to all in domiciliary services, care homes, in hospital wards, in essential public services and in the private sectors who supply us with all we need. Include journalists in broadcasting and print, together with their ancillary workers.

The date of Christmas, the significance of Christmas, the elements of seasonal traditions and the good will of followers of other faiths need not be divisive in these special days.

Here are points for trivia and quiz questions after the turkey. The histories of New Year's Days varied by culture and religions. Some are linked to the lunar calendar. During the use of the Julian calendar, New Year's Day had been on March 1 and 25, at Easter, on September 1 and December 25. William of Normandy ordered the re-establishment of January 1 as the beginning of the civic year. Scotland agreed and followed in 1600, before England in the 1750s when much of Europe kept March 25.

Our French Republican neighbours had a Calendar in use from 1793 to 1805: the first day of the first month, usually September 22: that autumn Equinox was their New Year's Day.

More fun can be had with questions about which jurisdictions are the first and last to start New Year celebrations. The International Date Line, the IDL, is not straight. It is not identical to the 180-degree anti-meridian. The 1994 realignment made the Kiribati atoll Caroline Island just about the first land to reach January 1, 2000 so it was renamed Millennium Island.

The nautical date line is not the same as the IDL. Nor does the same bit of land first see the sun rise throughout the year. For extra complications, try understanding time zones in Antarctica.

The middle of the constituency I serve is the important gap separating Ferring and Goring. At 50-degrees north and about half a degree west, we are securely away from the ends of the world.

Happy Christmas with best wishes for 2022.