

Special occasions

Comparing notes

- Josie** Can we go, Mikey? This music is so annoying.
- Mike** Hang on, I'm looking for something. There's a new computer game I want.
- Josie** I love Christmas, but I feel sorry for the shop assistants who have to listen to carols for weeks!
- Mike** I know. I'm sure they had this game somewhere – ah, perfect! I found what I was looking for, it was on the wrong shelf. We can go now, Josie.
- Josie** At last. Hey, there's Sophie. Hi! Are you buying Christmas cards already?
- Sophie** Oh hello you two. No, not yet. I was only choosing one or two to post to Australia. This time last year I was planning my trip there!
- Josie** That's right, I remember. Some cousins of yours live there, don't they? Or somebody in your family anyway.
- Mike** You're lucky! You've got relatives all over the world.
- Josie** And the Khans have got most of theirs in Pakistan. And Amy's got that uncle of hers who lives in Italy.
- Sophie** Where do you usually go for Christmas?





Josie

I like shopping with Mikey, but the shops are crowded already. Everybody is shopping early for Christmas, and it's not November yet! In my family, we post cards in early December and give presents on the 25th.

What about you? Do your shops get busy so soon?

Josie We don't go anywhere. Well, only to church of course. Twice.

Sophie Twice?

Josie Yeah, once with my dad and once with my mum. Since my parents got divorced, my brothers and I go to my dad's house on Christmas Eve and celebrate with his family. Then on Christmas Day, we have to go back home to my mum and do the same with hers.

Mike That's nice! You mustn't complain – you get two of everything! I don't know anybody who minds two turkey dinners or two piles of presents!

Sophie Still, I know what you mean, Josie. My parents separated years ago, and I envied my friends. I wanted a 'normal' family like theirs, but in fact single-parent families are really common now.

Mike Sophie, Jess asked us to research a story and it has to be different and original and clever and funny ...

Sophie Wow, she's quite a tough editor to work for, isn't she?

Mike She's hard to please, that's for sure! Any ideas?

Sophie You can interview me about Christmas in Sydney. And a friend of mine is a surfer and lifeguard there – I can ask him if you like!

Josie A surfer friend, wow! This is news. I bet he's really fit, too!

Mike Of course he's fit, silly, he's a lifeguard!

Josie No, I'm sure he's fit, but is he ... you know ... fit?

Christmas down under

Sophie Calm down, Wolfie, it's only Josie. Sorry, this is a really bad habit of his, every time the door bell rings.

Josie That's OK, I'm not scared of dogs.

Sophie Come in, oh hi Mike.

Mike I came along too, because I'm very interested in your friend who's a surfer.

Sophie Ah, well, actually he didn't reply to my e-mail. Sorry. I wrote to him about you.

Josie Are you a very special friend of his, Sophie?

Sophie Oh, no no. I just met him last year, on Bondi beach. On Christmas Eve, as a matter of fact.

Josie That's romantic!

Mike Yeah, on a beach in December. How cool is that! So can you tell us what it's like to have summer in winter?

Sophie It's very strange at first. While it was so cold here in Britain, I was swimming, sunbathing, surfing ... on a lovely golden beach.

Mike And do Australian children go to church? And do they have Santa Claus and trees with presents underneath, like we do?

Sophie Bizarrely, yes they do! Grandfathers or uncles have to dress up and pretend to be Father Christmas, even when the temperature's 30 degrees!

Mike But they don't eat a Christmas dinner like ours, do they? With roast turkey and vegetables, and plum pudding? Not in that heat, surely?

Sophie No, I had a barbecue with steaks and seafood, not a hot roast dinner. And when your mums were setting fire to the pudding, I had ice-cream to stay cool.

Josie We can write about special occasions, can't we Mike? Spud's family probably has some completely different traditions too, so we can compare them all.

Mike Have you got any photos from your trip last year, Sophie?

Sophie Yes, lots. Jay took hundreds of pictures of me and sent them all on a CD.

Josie Jay? Your surfer friend? And he's good-looking, isn't he?

Sophie Yes, and yes ... very!

Mike And he's a lifeguard. Great! Can you give us an e-mail address and then we can ask him for his story.



Sophie

Christmas in Australia is very strange for Europeans, because it's summer for them and winter for us. It's funny to celebrate Christmas when it's hot and sunny.

How important is Christmas for you? How do you celebrate it? What would it be like in a hot country?

Sophie Well, I'm not sure. I don't really want to bother him. I suppose I could mail him again.

Mike I can do it for you!

Josie Mikey, I think we should leave it to Sophie to get in touch with him. OK?

Mike But ...

Josie OK Mikey?

Mike Oh, OK.



A world of difference

Jess

Well, have we got anywhere with ideas for our 'Festivals' article? Somebody left a really nice story called 'The true meaning of Christmas' on my desk. Was that yours, Josie? Mike?

Mike

No, nothing to do with me! I brought some photos of mine from last year. Here's my sister. She's opening her presents.

Amy

What was Sharon wearing when you took that picture?

Mike

Those are her Micky Mouse slippers. We always get up early on Christmas morning and look in our stockings before our parents get up.

Josie

Just wait till I see her – I can tell her we like her style!

Mike

I'm in trouble if you do. How do you celebrate at yours, Spud?

Spud

Well, we're Muslims, so we don't go to church on Christmas Eve or anything.

Mike

We don't either. We just eat loads and watch TV!

Spud

Our big festival is also in December this year. It's the Eid, at the end of Ramadan and fasting. That means we eat lots too! My dad really likes Boxing Day because there's always sport to watch.

Josie

Is that why it's called Boxing Day?

Jess

No, it's nothing to do with boxing matches. I think it started with donation boxes in churches, which they opened on the 25th, and handed the money out on the 26th to the homeless.

Amy

That's one theory. I thought it was when rich people put their Christmas dinner leftovers into boxes and gave them to their servants the next day.

Mike

My mum still gives the postman and the dustman a 'Christmas box' which is like a tip.

Spud

It's a big day for sport – fox hunting was always on Boxing Day, until they banned it.

Josie

It's when the January sales start in all the big stores!

Mike

And it's when they begin the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. Sophie told us about it. And our neighbour Emily is there at the moment with her boyfriend Jake.

Jess

What is it?

Mike

It's this famous race they do in under two days, from Sydney to Tasmania.



Mike

I usually only think about food and presents at Christmas time, but it's interesting to talk to my friends about their different festivals and traditions. Spud likes food too, but his family celebrates the Eid.

What festivals from around the world do you know about? What's your favourite in Holland?

- Josie** I don't think I fancy summer in December. I'm dreaming of a white Christmas ...
- Mike** Yeah, but it doesn't snow much round here. Swimming and water-skiing in Australia's much more fun. Did Sophie ever mention her lifeguard guy again?
- Josie** No, but I can give her a call ... Hi, Sophie?
- Sophie** Hey Josie! I was meaning to ring you! Jay called me!
- Josie** Oh good! And can we mail him with some questions for this interview?
- Sophie** Better than that. He's going to fly over to the UK for Christmas! To see me!
- Josie** Wow! That's brilliant. So can I tell the others?
- Sophie** Sure. Bye now!
- Josie** Bye! Listen to this, you lot. Romance in the air ...



Gap year bloggers in Oz

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Read all of Emily and Jake's diaries.

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Emily and her boyfriend Jake are taking a gap year in Oz. They're doing an online diary of their trip.

June 23, 14:08



While in Sydney, we went to see a ballet at the Royal Opera House. We also visited Botany Bay and saw where Captain Cook landed in 1788.

5 Winter in Sydney is glorious. It gets chilly first thing in the morning and at night, but the daytime brings clear blue skies and warm weather. It is very relaxing to sit in a park or to go for a walk around Sydney at lunchtime. It is also amazing to watch the sunset around 4pm as the sky turns a beautiful deep red.

10 It's hard to resist Bondi Beach, which is a gorgeous arc of golden sand, even though it's very crowded in peak season. You hire deck chairs or throw towels on



the sand (if you're poor like us!), have a barbie, sit back and enjoy people watching. The sand slopes off gently at the northern end of the beach, so it is ideal for body surfing. When the weather is on the wild side, anybody with any sense leaves the water to the serious surfers and enjoys the coastal walk instead. However, we decided it was a shame to visit this famous surfing beach without at least trying to catch a wave. The southern end of Bondi is restricted to surfers; boards and wet suits are available for hire nearby. We got a lesson from Let's Go Surfing – not cheap but well worth it for the buzz!



25 We found that Christmas here is a smaller affair than it is in Britain. Christmas decorations don't appear until a couple of weeks before Christmas and by Boxing Day most things are back to normal. We liked this about Australia, but even so, this was the time Emily got really homesick and missed her family the most. For New Year, we returned to Melbourne, which had a number of events going on all over the city. We went to Federation Square, and the banks of the Yarra River, to see some live music and watch the fireworks at midnight.

Next month we're hoping to earn enough to take in
35 Tasmania – so catch you later! 2 reactions, more...