

Today's Australia: the five faces of Christmas

How do you celebrate Christmas? It can take on many forms, especially in such a multicultural area. Reporter **Samantha Day** spoke to five people with very different ways of spending the big day.

LONG gone are the days when everyone huddled around a tinsel-laden table to savour piping hot roast lunches on a sweltering Christmas Day.

While there are still some who celebrate Christmas the traditional way with all the trimmings, others jet-set overseas, volunteer to help the needy, sign up for work or even head to a hotel to escape the stress of Christmas lunch.

There's no right or wrong way to relish the fun and festivities of Christmas Day.

For some, the silly season is the best time of year to celebrate with neighbours, friends and relatives while catching up over a festive beverage or two. For others, it can be a sad reminder of happier times or a lonely patch on the yearly calendar.

Though everyone's Christmas is different,



there is one common thread that strings them all together – the festive feast.

Christmas isn't Christmas without roast turkey, fresh seafood, baked vegetables, salads, barbecues, puddings, custard and cakes.

We at the *Advertiser* know everyone's Christmas is unique.

There are hundreds of ways residents will be making merry this Christmas Day – here's a taste of just five of them.

THE TRADITIONAL



IF it ain't broke, why fix it? While many people will spend Christmas in less conventional fashion, there are still plenty who celebrate the good old-fashioned way.

A true Aussie Christmas devotee, **Michelle Hendry** will serve up a traditional roast lunch with all the trimmings for her 15 member family.

They'll start with champagne cocktails, fresh prawns and oysters kilpatrick and then the family will tuck into roast turkey, lamb, beef and pork with vegetables and family favourites like Waldorf salad.

"If we're still standing then we'll have the desserts," she said. "We'll have a rolled pavlova, chocolate mud cake with mint, and lollies and chocolates for the grandkids."

Christmas wouldn't be the same without a few festive beverages so Mrs Hendry will be stacking the fridge with beers and wine.

"We'll sneak in a cheeky Baileys or two as well."

For the Hendrys, Christmas is a precious time of year where the family can relax, spoil themselves and make merry memories for future Christmases to come.

THE HOTEL



AFTER years of doing roast lunches and barbecues for her family of 30, **Yasmin Ager** decided to let The Sebel, Parramatta do all the dirty work.

This will be the fourth year, the Ager family (Yasmin, her husband, two daughters and mother) has relished a Christmas Day buffet lunch at The Sebel.

"I'm still trying to convince the rest of the family to join us," she joked.

Yet, it wasn't just the stress of catering a lunch for 30 that prompted the move. After the death of Mr Ager's father, the family found that Christmas at home was a sad reminder of happier times.

"It was just never the same trying to recreate Christmas without dad," she said.

Though the experience is completely different, Mrs Ager enjoys being able to sit down and savour Christmas Day without spending hours in the kitchen.

"Mum and I worked out that if we did a spread similar to The Sebel's at home with roast meats, seafood and puddings we'd be spending \$1500 to feed our big family," she said. "And best of all, there's no washing up."

THE VOLUNTEERS



FOR the women of Making a Difference at Christmas, there's no better gift to give than their time.

And **Shirley Wehbe**, **Sandra Younis**, **Bev Badcock**, **Trish Foley** and **Kalyani Perera** all say they wouldn't have it any other way.

"When I leave I feel like I've really made a difference and I don't feel guilty going to my family Christmas where there are huge food platters," said Mrs Wehbe.

The women are part of the large volunteer group behind the charity's Christmas brunch for the lonely and needy. The brunch – which includes roast chicken, salads and Christmas pudding to more than 500 people – has been served up at Parramatta's Town Hall for eight years.

"We had about 100 volunteers come by to donate their time," said Mrs Wehbe. "Some mothers bring in their teenage children to show how the other half live and get them to help out," added Mrs Foley.

Mrs Badcock added: "You can't put a value on the time we spend. It's all about the joy of giving."

For more information please call 9633 5433.

I'M OFF OVERSEAS



ALMOST every year since moving to Sydney in 2002, **Amarinder Bajwa** and his family have made the trip back to Punjab, India, to celebrate Christmas.

It's the perfect time of year for Mr Bajwa and his wife **Harvinder** to take their school-aged children **Angad** and **Sirjan** overseas to experience their native culture and traditions.

"They get really excited about going over," said Mr Bajwa. "They look forward to going all year."

Mr Bajwa said Christmas with his family in Punjab does not differ much from how Australians celebrate.

"We greet friends and family, give cards and presents, exchange sweets and eat a lot," he said.

Traditional curries, lentils and vegetables as well as desserts including gulab and halva are just some of the dishes the Bajwa family look forward to savouring.

"Many people in the Punjab region are of Sikh background so it is a very tolerant society. We have a lot of Christians, Hindus and Muslims and they are all celebrating Christmas in their own way. It's very democratic."

ROSTERED TO WORK



THE thought of working on Christmas Day is daunting for some but for Italian expat **Bianca Ciliberto** it's the only way to merrily mingle with her "family".

Ms Ciliberto, a manager at Criniti's Parramatta, will form part of the team serving up Christmas Day lunch at the restaurant. It's a special day for her and other waitstaff.

"Because I have no family here, it's great to be able to work and spend Christmas with my workmates who are like my second family," she said.

"I worked Christmas Day last year and it was fantastic – I really enjoyed it. It was great to be around so many families celebrating Christmas, giving each other presents and sharing the day together."

Ms Ciliberto, who hails from Catania on the island of Sicily, usually spends Christmas rugged-up inside with relatives. This year she'll be serving up dishes from Criniti's extensive menu to jolly diners.

"I won't have time for Christmas lunch but hopefully we'll be able to have a few drinks after work."