

HANNAH IS... OUTSPOKEN

“Going home for Christmas? It’s overrated”

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When are you going home for Christmas?”

As one of Dubai’s many expats living abroad from family, I’m currently being asked this question on at least a twice-daily basis. And when I answer by saying that, actually, I’m not going home at all, I get a look that suggests I’ve just said I’m spending Christmas on Jupiter.

Then comes the second question: “Why aren’t you going back to the UK for Christmas?” Well, if you ask me, the more pertinent question is, *why would I?* Why would I leave Dubai when the weather’s at its best in order to swap perfect sunshine and sea breeze for a Grey Christmas? (For the blissfully uninitiated, that’s the closest Britain gets to dreaming of a White Christmas.)

I know, I know. It’s not all about the weather – and I do feel a little guilty that my near-phobic aversion to temperatures below 24°C overrides my obligation to see the woman who literally gave birth to me.

But in my defence, I’ve had so many family Christmases, I can predict an hour-by-hour schedule of what would happen if I were to go home this year. I’d wake up jetlagged, knackered from the seven hour flight, and freezing cold despite the thermal pyjamas and quilted coat I resorted to sleeping in the last time I visited the UK. My sister and I would go into our parents’ bedroom and show them the presents that ‘Santa’ left in our stocking, while my mother puts on a show of surprise and delight convincing enough to nab the Oscar from under Meryl Streep’s nose. (My sister and I are 24 and 26,

respectively – this charade is as farcical as it is adorable.) A few hours later, our uncle will stumble out of bed, by which time we’ve been driven halfway to madness waiting to open our presents. The present-opening rigmarole will take us through till at least 3pm, by which time we’re squabbling over who should lay the table so we can eat ready Christmas lunch – the same Christmas lunch we’ve eaten every year for the 26 years I’ve been alive. By 6pm we’re slumped on the sofa, stuffing our faces with chocolate and slowly suffocating in a fog of sprouts-induced flatulence. Come Boxing Day, cabin fever’s set in, and it frankly makes *The Shining* look like a relaxing stay-cay.

If I sound like a miserable Grinch, allow me to explain myself. I actually love family Christmases, and I find it comforting to know that those traditions will always be there. But that’s the thing – I have many years ahead of me to enjoy Christmas with my family, so why not make the most of my time in Dubai by celebrating here?

Being able to do exactly what you feel like doing on Christmas day is incredibly liberating. Don’t feel like wrestling a turkey into the oven? Go out for lunch and let someone else do the cooking. Actually, you know what? You’ve never really been a fan of turkey anyway. Go on, order a curry, if that’s what you feel like, and eat it in your pyjamas – there’s no judgement here.

It’s also an opportunity to create new Christmas traditions with your adopted ‘Dubai family’. Last year, my friend and I did our last minute Christmas Eve shopping in the (blissfully quiet) Dubai Mall and then headed to

Fibber Magee’s for a festive fry-up – a ritual we fully intend on repeating this year. Another friend told me that she starts every Christmas Day by running into the sea – something she certainly couldn’t do in her native Scotland (unless she planned on spending Boxing Day tucked up with a cosy case of hypothermia).

I’ve always believed that your friends are the family you create for yourself, and that becomes even more significant when you’re living thousands of miles away from your real family. Spending Christmas with friends is a lovely way to show them how thankful you are for the love and support they give you, to celebrate the near-familial bond you share. And when I do next spend Christmas in the UK with the family I was born to, I’ll appreciate our traditions all the more for having had a break. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and all that...

There’s one other thing that jars when people ask me when I’m going home for Christmas. For now, at least, Dubai is home – so why not make some festive memories here?”



Hannah Bass is Stylist Arabia’s acting editor



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