

# Surfing, Cricket and Christmas Dinner?!

Summer remembered in Australia *by David Whitehead*

Sharing some of his personal memories, David Whitehead reminds us that while countries in the southern hemisphere have their summer season from December to February, summer evokes similar feelings in all of us.

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Piercing sunshine burns its way through my curtains and stirs me from my deep sleep. There is no chance of escaping this heat. I look at the alarm clock. It is only 5.30 a.m. Cicadas chirp and birds sing and I realize that trying to fall sleep again is futile.

I grab my towel and shoes and jump on my bike. In minutes I am in another world, riding waves with other early morning surfers. The warmth of the sun on my back and the cool water splashing at my face make me feel

packs the picnic basket while the kids play with their presents. We will meet our relatives at the beach for lunch and go swimming and, more importantly, play some cricket. Like every year, hundreds of people will be there. In the afternoon we will travel to our grandparents for dinner and more food and presents. There is no rush. The sun will be up until very late.

People from the northern hemisphere cannot imagine Christmas being celebrated on the beach. Christmas normally evokes images of wintry Nativity scenes, reindeer pulling the fat, jolly Santa in his big red coat, families decorating a Christmas tree as the fire crackles and Dean Martin imploring the heavens to "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow". Despite the fact that the temperature is usually in the mid-thirties, Australians also associate Christmas with winter pictures and symbols.

## Summer expressed in song, film and romantic spirit

Christmas, or no Christmas, summer around the world has very similar meanings. It is the season dreamt of, the season celebrated in films and music, the season which carries with it feelings of anticipation and excitement. It is always a time of gay abandon. Our greatest memories are of summers past. Bryan Adams is still heard right across the world reminiscing about the summer of '69, year after year DJ's pull out "Summer in the City", "Summertime", "The Things We Did Last Summer", the old favourite, "The Boys of Summer" and all the Beach Boys' songs. Even great films like *Top Gun*, *Dirty Dancing* and the timeless *Endless Summer* express the magical nature of summer. It is hard to find a song or film which portrays summer in a negative light or promises misery. Instead, the subjects are new love, adventure, excitement, and fresh beginnings.

A Swedish proverb states that, 'A year without summer is like a life without love'. Most of us would be able to recall that great summer romance. Whether it lasted years, months or even days, it somehow lives on in our memories. True, our judgment or memory may be clouded by too many sunrises, too much salt water or too many long nights. But nothing can dent the enthusiasm or optimism with which we dived into the romance. The reality of having to part and go back to homes possibly thousands of



**People wearing Santa hats on the beach! It's Christmas in Australia.**

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/coolkiddo/2189293845/>

only a step away from heaven. Feeling energized and refreshed, I decide to head home. I pass an elderly couple walking their Golden Retriever and we exchange best wishes with each other. Everyone seems happy today. And why wouldn't they be? It's Christmas Day.

## Christmas traditions

When I arrive home, mum is a little annoyed that I have been out so long because everyone has been waiting for me. Dad has already fired up the barbecue, and the sausages, bacon and eggs are sizzling away. My little sister brings all the presents outside to the verandah and we all sit in the burning morning sun alternately ripping open our presents and enjoying our breakfast.

Like always, dad cleans up after breakfast and mum



**When summer is there,  
love is in the air.**

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/placid73/2312343050/>

kilometers apart didn't douse that burning flame. We moved with our hearts and threw caution to the wind. Let our winter of discontent come. For now, we live in the moment. That was the summer motto.

### New beginning

Western societies organize themselves around the summer season. Coming from Australia, I was shocked to learn that the school year in the northern hemisphere began in September. I wondered what encouraged the education systems in these countries to disregard the calendar year and ensure that the long break was over the summer. Perhaps it was the thought of sitting inside for two months watching the sleet, with nothing to do and nowhere to go. In Australia it just all fits in perfectly. The school year ends just before Christmas, then comes New Year's Eve (always celebrated outdoors and normally on the beach) followed by a few more weeks of summer fun, and then it's back to school at the beginning of February. Simple. We can dust off the old year and spend the magical summer time building up for the year to come.

### Summer hazards

The adventure, excitement and optimism which comes when summer is 'in the air' can also have a downside. Perhaps the sun really does burn away our pretences and common sense. Australia, known as the sunburnt country, has more creatures that can kill you than any other continent on earth. In fact, nearly 400 tourists die there each year. The killers can be found on the ground, in trees, under the ground or in the water. Tourist, beware!

In the summer months, the beaches in the northern part of Australia are closed because of deadly water creatures. In a country which hosts snakes of the most deadly variety, scorpions, crocodiles, sharks, spiders, deadly octopuses and killer wasps, it is surprising that each year there are guaranteed to be European tourists that die in another, no less horrible, way. Every year, without fail there are cases of Britons, Germans or Austrians whose cars broke down in the desert and were left to die of thirst in 55°C+ heat. Exactly what makes people want to drive through the middle of Australia in summer is unclear.

What is the essence of summer? As long as you avoid the sharks, the jellyfish and the desert, your adventures are sure to remain with you for a long, long time. Who knows, one day the song title will be "Summer of 08" ...



**This is not someone you want to meet on vacation!**

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