

Christmas in 21st century Australia

McCrindle Research asked Australians about their attitudes to Christmas, how they celebrate or whether they celebrate Christmas at all. Here's a reflection on the results.

A celebration for all

57% of survey respondents identified themselves as belonging to a religion that celebrates Christmas as a religious holiday. 87% of those who are not religious still celebrate Christmas to some extent. 56% of those who belong to another religion still celebrate Christmas.

For most, the highlights of Christmas revolve around celebrations and holidays with family and friends (46%) followed by the secular traditions (such as exchanging gifts, the Christmas tree and the general Christmas spirit), 37%. However the third ranked highlights were religious elements (15%) which included attending services, carol singing, and nativity plays. Those who don't celebrate Christmas at all cite commercialism, family problems or lack of family as their main reasons..

"Each year in our calendar we have some events that unite a family such as birthdays and anniversaries, and there are other sporting events or public holidays that somewhat unite a nation or communities. However Christmas is unique on the Australian calendar in that it simultaneously gathers families and the broader community in celebration," writes social researcher Mark McCrindle.



The not-so-merry aspects

The thing that most annoys Australians at Christmas time is shopping. 81% are of the opinion that our shops set up for Christmas much earlier than necessary. In fact half of Australians (49.7%) would prefer the Christmas set-up begin in late November or early December.

- 3 in 4 (74%) are most annoyed by over-crowded shopping centres.
- 7 in 10 (69%) rate commercialism as a top 3 Christmas gripe.
- 4 in 10 (39%) state that the pressure to buy presents is a big irritation.

Season's Cynicism – quotes from respondents:

"The commercialism of Christmas brings a lot of sadness (such as) high expectations from children for expensive gifts when often there is no money to spare."

"The commercialisation is insipid, presents are a waste of money, and the religious aspect has no significance to me."

"The true meaning of Christmas has been lost... a time of expense and often trouble with family members..."

Our holiday habits

Examining those who do celebrate Christmas to some degree, 1 in 5 (19%) will “definitely” attend a Christmas service this year while 2 in 5 (38%) Christmas celebrators have never attended a Christmas service.

Nearly 4 in 5 (78%) have or will be sending Christmas cards this year.

The most common household Christmas decorations are the Christmas tree (86%), and Christmas stockings (81%), followed by Christmas lights (60%), tinsel (55%) and wreaths (37%).

The majority of us most often celebrate Christmas Day with our parents or extended family (61%). We are, however, less likely to celebrate with our in-laws (27%). For 9% of Australians Christmas will be celebrated with a group of friends, and 2% will spend Christmas alone.

Australians are most likely to sit down to a Christmas lunch of ham, turkey and salad, followed by plum pudding. Other popular dishes of the day are roast chicken, seafood and roast vegetables.

For 13% of the population, Christmas Eve is the highlight of the Christmas calendar. For the vast majority though (85%) it’s still all about Christmas Day.

“Interestingly even in these secular and pluralistic times, Christmas highlights the religious roots of our nation. Far from a decline of religious sentiment there is a measurable turning of the tide today, from crass materialism towards more traditional values and perspectives. From carol singing to church attendance, the Christian aspects of Christmas remain significant in Australia” writes Mark McCrindle.

Do you believe in Santa?

- 9 in 10 Australians believed in Santa Claus when they were kids
- 4 in 5 parents give their children presents from Santa, either in a Christmas stocking or as wrapped presents under the tree.
- 1 in 4 (27%) parents who have young children are “uncomfortable” with the discussions they have with their children in affirming Santa Claus.

What Aussie parents say – quotes from respondents:

“My children believe in Santa but they also know the real reason for Christmas (Jesus’ birth).”

“Father Christmas is part of childhood. Let’s not spoil it.”

“We don’t discourage it (Santa) but we don’t make it a big deal either.”

“I won’t be lying to my daughter about Santa. I feel Santa represents the commercial side of Christmas, which I hate.”

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