

Holidays Aways Fr

Holidays are so often associated with home - the scent of festive-season cooking, the familiarity of extended family, particular memories and customs tied to geographic locations. So how do our international members recreate traditional holidays when living away from their home countries?

Durriya Dohadwala fasts from dawn until sunset for *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is a period for self-purification and good deeds. The fasting is intended to teach patience, humility and spirituality. Ramadan ends with *Eid ul Fitr* (the celebration at the end of the fast). Durriya said that initially she had difficulty fasting in Singapore because, unlike in her home country of Pakistan, work hours here are not adjusted to accommodate

India. When Piu lived in Cairo, however, she adapted the usual 'Happy *Diwali*' banner above her doorway by cutting up a sheet of yellow poster paper and decorating it with sequins, bright beads and golden ribbons. In Seoul, when flower offerings for the goddess Durga were needed, the weather was freezing and no fresh flowers were available, so Piu bought potpourri, removed all the dried rose petals from the pack and offered those. On another occasion, because mango trees don't grow in Seoul, she made do with maple instead of mango leaves to put inside the brass pot beside the god Rama's image.

A little-known festival that is especially meaningful to **Abha Kaul** is *Karva Chauth*, celebrated 10 days before *Diwali*. *Karva Chauth* is a North Indian festival for married women in



Nadia Dohadwala with bangles and henna patterns; photo by Durriya Dohadwala



Piu Lahiri's 80-year-old image of Ma Durga; photo by Piu Lahiri



Karva Chauth as celebrated at Beverly Hill condominium, Singapore; photo courtesy of Abha Kaul

the practice. The holiday is three days in Pakistan (one day in Singapore), during which families go visiting. Back home, parties are held at day's end to break the fast, but with fewer friends and family here, Durriya finds the celebrations less festive. On the eve of *Eid* it is customary for girls to buy bangles that match their clothes and to get henna designs painted on their hands. Durriya tries to replicate the Pakistani version of this experience by inviting someone to her home to do the henna for her daughter and her friends.

Diwali, popularly known as the festival of lights, celebrates the victory of good over evil, with oil-lamp flames warding off darkness and filling homes with light and happiness. A Hindu festival also celebrated by Jains and Sikhs, it is known here as *Deepavali*. **Piu Lahiri** feels there is little difference between celebrating here and in India because virtually everything she needs is available in Little

which they fast for one day, pray in a group and then break their fast only when the moon is sighted. The women dress in their wedding saris and spend the day in contemplation of their sacred marriage vows, celebrating the state of being married and reaffirming their commitment to their husbands. They pray to the goddess Parvati, Lord Shiva's wife, because she is married to the ideal husband. The prayers are for the health, well-being and longevity of their own husbands and for a calm, balanced family life. In India, Abha celebrated the festival with a small group of relatives - aunts and sisters-in-law - since the prayers are stronger if there is more than one woman performing them. Here in Singapore, a group of 20-30 women get together for prayers, but don't fast the entire day. Abha celebrates with just one friend, who like her, prefers to maintain the traditional forms of the festival.

om Home

MEMBERS FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO CELEBRATE SPECIAL DAYS

By Andra Leo

As far back as the 1930s, a British *mem* stationed with her husband in a Malayan jungle outpost (as told in *Tales from the South China Seas* by Charles Allen), celebrated Christmas 'with locally made plum pudding and a cold-storage turkey', not from America, but from Australia. (The Cold Storage Company, established here in 1903, provided these goods.) A casuarina tree's branch served as a Christmas tree.

Six FOM members from the United States as well as Europe shared their experiences of Christmas 'adaptations'. **Jo Wright** wrote that in England, "Christmas meant visiting family, being disappointed by the lack of snow, eating far too much and watching re-runs of *The Sound of Music* on the telly. Being in Singapore has meant getting away from the need to visit family at opposite ends of the country, so

Not surprisingly, Singapore's hot, humid climate has the strongest effect on how their traditions are celebrated. As Milena wrote, "Instead of a white Christmas, ours is warm and green." Cookies and pre-Christmas baking are important features of German, Croatian and Scandinavian festivities. In the European winter, the baking begins a month ahead of the holiday. Here it is done just days before Christmas so the cookies remain fresh. In all three countries, Christmas Eve is especially important, with families attending church services, a tradition they all maintain in Singapore. In Croatia, children receive some small gifts early – on 6 December (St. Nicholas Day), but the main gift-giving for all these families is on Christmas Eve. In their home countries Christmas Day means a huge family lunch, so



The Danish Church in Singapore; photo by Ingvill Solbo Christiansen



Christmas cakes and Licitars (edible decorations); photo by Milena Sarapa



Jo Wright and her family celebrate a tropical Christmas; photo by Jo Wright

for the first few years we made a point of being away over Christmas." Last year Jo's family spent their first Christmas in Singapore, where it's "rather nice to swim in the pool on Christmas morning." But, she said, the humidity made "a soggy mess" of her royal icing and the Christmas pudding had turned mouldy by Christmas Day. American **Catherine Campbell-Thomas'** family spends Christmas away from Singapore, going home to America one year and travelling somewhere 'distinctive' in the other – the Taj Mahal one Christmas, Luang Prabang the next. They decorated their hotel rooms with palm fronds instead of fir boughs and the children brought stockings from home to 'hang' from the TV.

Carmen Frings and **Gisella Harrold** are both from Germany, **Milena Sarapa** is Croatian and Norwegian **Ingvill Solbo Christiansen** described a Scandinavian Christmas.

but here the celebration is smaller, with just the immediate family or perhaps a few friends are also invited. A hotel brunch is an occasional indulgence for Gisella and her family.

Compiling these accounts, I was aware of a tinge of nostalgia for home, for family and for traditional ways of celebrating. In their 'homes away from home', our members seem to have found ways of adapting traditions to accommodate the climate. Perhaps most important, they have come to enjoy the uniqueness of celebrations in this multi-faceted microcosm of the world.

Andra Leo has lived in Singapore for more than 40 years. Her Christmas traditions are European, maintained throughout her life here and now followed by her Singaporean son's family.
