

Of prawns, turkey and nutloaf. Christmas food 2024

December 2024

In December 2024 I asked my FB friends: 'What do you have for Christmas lunch or dinner?'

Two captured well the change that is often commented on between generations – the change from a hot meal on a hot day to a cold one.

60 years ago, it was roast chicken lunch at grandparents (chicken was a twice a year experience – Christmas & Birthday), leg of ham carved at the table, roast veg (one year we had potato gems, my first memory of a frozen veg) & home-made pudding (it was a huge production number), brandy and cream sauce. This year it will be a grazing board of cold meats, cheese, dips, salads and maybe seafood if local catches are good (seafood is very dependent on quality).

When I was a child xmas day always seemed to be incredibly hot made worse by a baked lunch in a tiny, crowded house, mainly featuring turkey and ham and baked vegies. These days it's usually everything cold and providing pescatarian and gluten free options - prawns, turkey, ham, salads. Dessert is usually xmas pudding, pavlova or xmas log. Nuts and chocolate have always been a xmas tradition for me. This year we'll be at Woodford so it will be some sort of picnic probably featuring lots of cheese and champagne.

Two commented on the difference in the Christmas climate between Australia and Europe and the different responses to this in their family.

My family may be mainly Norwegian with a dash of Italian, but we do understand that we live in the southern hemisphere and that it is the summer solstice we are celebrating, so we eat cold food: prawns, cold meats, cold roasted vegetables with maple syrup, salads, kransekake (Garland Cake. Almond macaroon rings built on a tower with gelato).

We understood the weather here to, but stoically stuck to my parents Estonian tradition. the seafoody Xmas just does not ring the XMAS bells for me.

Some recounted family tradition/ways and of changes in these:

Mum's traditional was homemade Sauerkraut, homemade Black Pudding & Red Currant Jam we made these at least a week before as a family~ peas & carrots in a white sauce, Roast Pork with everybody eyeing the crackling , and the roastiest roast Potatoes ~ followed by my Sisters Trifle.

Family is big and we can all cook well, so everyone brings a dish to share. The feast usually includes a range of meats salads and veg catering for all. Dessert includes plum pud, custard and hard sauce and something for those who don't like pud – often a pav or lemon meringue pie with ice cream.

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Nothing like my poor mum cooked for us for years. Sweltering heat but a hot Christmas lunch was the go. Always made the pudding 2 months prior then hung to be reheated that morning. Home custard . Lunch was a cooked chicken with all the vegetables. Ham if the household budget could afford it. Never a whole one. Slices from a leg of ham at the local shop. Sometimes tin ham,

remember that vile stuff anyone? Trifle was also made. Mum would also make a fruit cake. Mum did all the work, with us kids having set jobs. Dad had the job of getting merry, my mum said Christmas was for drunks and children. Wayback in the 60s stone fruit was only around Christmas. I recall the joy of having a plum and a peach each. Fruit and vegies came by rail back then. Still, I recall it fondly including the foul weather, even the odd cyclone. Late years mum switched to cold lunch but still did her pudding and by then she had to make a pavlova. Myself it's pretty basic. Prawns are a must, sometimes Morton Bay bugs, cold lunch loads of salad and meat. I make a mean trifle. Might have some traditional fare of rum balls and apricot balls. Breakfast is bacon and eggs and maybe skies of ham though.

For the last few years my uncle has included BBQ'd haloumi in our Chrissy day lunch BBQ. Definitely our family's favourite modern menu item!

As a family when we were kids we would most often go to a restaurant or hotel for Christmas dinner. The outing always included an elderly neighbour who would otherwise be spending Christmas alone. If we went to a hotel for Christmas lunch, there would be entertainment (e.g., magic show) and dancing. Chinese restaurant this year - it's become a regular in the past 13 years since being back in the U.K., for when I spend the holidays with my family. We usually go for the set menu that includes a selection of starters (not soup), a selection of classic main courses and deep-fried banana and ice cream for desert

There was a split between the traditional turkey and the contemporary prawn with turkey pipping prawns at the post, the latter sometimes being one in a duo or trio of other seafood.

Turkey

For me it has to be a traditional English Christmas lunch of roast turkey and stuffing with the full works though I avoid Brussels Sprouts (vomit).

An inevitable conflict within the family - the men desire the roast turkey, although we have also done a deep-fried turkey (we have nth Americans in the family), roast potatoes are an imperative with gravy, and the men prepare and cook none of it.

My son does the turkey I used to make when they were growing up – cover the turkey I a paste of ground hazelnuts, garlic, and oil – cook turkey covered till the last half hour or so, then take the cover off crisp up the paste on the turkey - tastes delicious and turkey is always moist inside its nutty garlicky shell.

One dined on chicken and another on capon.

Prawns and other seafood

Prawns for first course, maybe some oysters. Haven't yet decided on main course. Not turkey I hope, though there is one guest who may insist on it.

Exmouth prawns in red curry paste, Abrolhos cray with champagne sauce and Irish gin trifle. A wee snooze and repeat.

Thai prawn skewers on the BBQ, Balmain bugs with garlic butter on the BBQ, Thai fish cakes, cold soy fillet beef, thinly sliced, cabbage crunch salad, potato salad. Plus a surprise dish - different every year. Poached pear and homemade ice cream for dessert

Prawns and mangoes.

Combinations

Turkey + Fish, various salads, traditional and ice cream puddings. I usually do a range of fiddly hors d'oeuvres.

Oysters, prawns, & home-made aioli, chicken, ham, salads and some sort of potato dish.

Thinking further about mains, probably white poached chicken portions rolled in finely chopped herbs, sliced (Lucas Meats) ham, mustard, mayonnaise, and a selection of salads. Or may go with cold baked fish plus herbed mayo and salads

Two commented on their Christmas breakfasts:

Don't leave out breakfast. I've been starting with good ham and English mustard on toast since childhood (English style ham, not jamon, which I usually prefer). Preferred beverage: a good flat white followed by a glass of premium Tassie sparkling as Santa passes around the presents. Just one usually as it's going to be a long day. A Christmas playlist can often start at this point but save the punk one for later

Prawn Benedict on home-made sourdough toast for Christmas breakfast. Homemade hollandaise sauce, essentially butter on butter with egg yolk, lemon juice, emulsified into God's essence. Medium cooked and stripped Tiger prawns. Thick sourdough, absolutely thick. Toast the bread to perfection. Apply cold prawns to perfect toast. Literally drown in hollandaise and consume with great vigour and delight

The dessert course also showed variation:

When my kids were growing up for dessert I would make Scottish Cloutie Dimpling - boiled in a cloth for hours and I had the obligatory silver sixpence inside it in those days - then served with custard.

Xmas pudding and a shitload of custard to make it a little interesting.

Pudding Lady pudding for dessert.

Chocolate pavlova with fresh raspberries & double cream on top.

There was one bid for nutloaf

A final comment by way of summing up:

Ok, I have my menu sorted:

- prawns with fennel, limes & sumac as entree (Ottolenghi)
- maple glazed ham (tin eats)
- side of salmon with a chilli, tomato & cashew paste (Lesley created it)
- watermelon salad with feta & mint
- green salad
- hasselback potatoes

-pistachio ice cream bombe (Ottolenghi)

- berry salad

Lots of these are made ahead and it's mostly light food also all gluten free