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Christmas traditions differ

By Mary Jo Howe

If Santa on a surfboard and garbage in the streets sounds like a foreign Christmas, you're right. Those are some of the things UNL foreign students will miss most this holiday season.

In Australia, Santa Claus traditionally rides to shore on a surfboard to bless the crowd gathered at the beach, said David Chinchin, a graduate marketing student from Brisbane, Australia. Santa wears the heavy red suit and white beard of the English tradition, but due to the high temperatures, Santa suffering heat stroke is a big problem, he said.

Since Christmas occurs during the summer season in the southern hemisphere, the traditional Christmas meal is cold. After the dinner, everyone heads for the beach and the surf.

Chinchin's first Christmas season in the U.S. took a big adjustment. "I left a 95-degree weather in Australia and it was 27 below zero when I reached Nebraska," he said. "Being housebound was quite a problem."

Students in Australia are on summer break from November to February, so the parties and preparations are much more intense, he said.

Australians celebrate Christmas through the 26th. The 26th is called boxing day for an old English tradition where the landed gentry boxed-up left over gifts to give their servants.

"But we don't do that anymore," he said. "It's just a day to sit around and get over Christmas."

"New Year's," he added, "is fundamentally crazy."

Christmas is nonexistent in the Soviet Union, said Pinchos Ostromogilsky, a graduate civil engineering student from Kiev. Instead, New Year is the big holiday. Streets and parks are decorated with colored lights and the family gets together with relatives and friends for parties and special dinners.

The best wine and food are consumed at this time, Ostromogilsky said. And at 12 midnight, everyone congratulates each other, he said. Somebody from the govern-

ment makes a speech on the radio and wishes the best new year to the people.

Ostromogilsky has been in the U.S. for four years and said that the New Year celebrations are really quite similar. He also celebrates Christmas in the U.S. with his family and friends. In the Soviet Union, a man similar to Santa Claus, called the "Frost Man" visits schools and theatres to give gifts to the children.

In Venezuela, Christmas is looked forward to for a long time, said Frank Bolivar, a senior Industrial Engineering student from Maracay. He said he doesn't think Christmas is as happy in the U.S. as it is in Venezuela.

Everyone looks forward to the food, parties, seeing relatives and hearing the special music, he said.

Instead of a Santa Claus, Baby Jesus is supposed to bring gifts to the children. But most kids are too smart to believe that anymore, Bolivar said.

"It is very important to be with the family. We embrace, drink, make a toast. But it can be a sad time, especially for students who are away from home." Bolivar said he will be getting together with some other Venezuelan students this year.

The Christmas holiday in Viet Nam didn't exist until the "westerners" came, said Khoi Ngo, junior marketing student from Saigon. The traditional holiday is the Lunar New Year which is celebrated at the end of January or the beginning of February. It is the most important holiday of the year, he said.

Traditionally, everyone stays up all night, he said, and parents go to a pagoda to pray for a good year. Children stand in front of the parents and wish them a Happy New Year and receive "lucky money." Then they visit relatives and eat.

On New Year's day, parades are held in the streets and a 20 ft. dragon, carried by 20 people winds its way through the city. In the countryside, people release pigeons, hold wrestling tournaments and cock fights.

Bengt Jonsson, a junior business major from Sollestea, Sweden said he will miss the Swedish food this Christmas.

Continued on page 15



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