

# Oxford Australia Word of the Month

July 2008

**ozmas** – ‘a Christmas celebration in the Australian winter’

Australian National Dictionary Centre

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# ozmas

## The story behind the Word of the Month

When E.E. Morris published *Austral English* in 1898, he included an entry for **Christmas**, suggesting that the term had acquired a specific Australasian meaning:

**Christmas** As Christmas falls in Australasia at Midsummer, it has different characteristics from those in England, and the word has therefore a different connotation.

Subsequent dictionary makers have not followed Morris's lead, and in our dictionaries **Christmas** is simply given its date and significance within the Christian calendar.

Australians, however, have increasingly explored ways of modifying the northern hemisphere Christmas traditions, so that these traditions might be more in keeping with the summer realities of the 'sunburnt country'—the roast turkey and hot vegetables are likely to be replaced by cold seafood. A recent Australian modification has been more radical—to have the traditional hot Christmas lunch in the middle of winter, and to conduct 'Christmas in winter' celebrations. In 1989 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

A log fire glows in the corner, holly hangs from the rafters and the sound of carols drifts into the dining room. The guests warm up with mulled wine and eggnog. Later there will be pudding and brandy butter. Only one thing mars the yuletide atmosphere—the date. For this is Australia and winter falls in June. True to the antipodean logic, a number of Australian resorts are beginning to celebrate Christmas upside-down. As soon as the cold snap hits the mountains, preparations begin for the festive season—European style.

At about the same time as this passage appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a passage in the Hobart

*Mercury* indicated the development of a new term to describe an Australian Christmas:

Australians have difficulty relating to the European traditional white Christmas. Last century we celebrated our own form of Christmas – an Ozmas, if you like. 'Australian Christmas cards from 1850 to 1890 featured our own Father Christmas dressed as a squatter with an open shirt with Aborigines lighting his pipe', Dr Guthridge said. 'He also rode in an old wagon pulled by kangaroos'.

Here is our first evidence for the term **Ozmas**, a blend of 'Oz' for 'Australia' and 'Christmas'. In this 1989 quotation **Ozmas** refers to the Australian modifications of the 25 December activities, but later uses show that it has been transferred to the Australian mid-winter celebration.

An early example occurs in the *Melbourne Age* in 1992: 'At the end of next month he will create his annual "Christmas" feast served to friends during the Australian winter —known as Ozmas. "It's the full catastrophe from pumpkin soup cooked in the pumpkin for entree, to turkey, chippolatas (small sausages), all the appropriate sauces, followed by Christmas pudding.'" The **Ozmas** tradition is now firmly entrenched as a winter festivity in many parts of Australia: 'Ozmas luncheons. Do yourself a favour and help others learn job skills by having an Ozmas dinner at Drysdale this week or next. A three-course Christmas lunch ... costs only \$30' (*Hobart Mercury* 2006).

**Ozmas** is therefore one of our most recently created Australian words.

metrosexual  
weapon  
of mass  
destruction  
karrack  
glycaemic  
burka  
index  
barbecue  
stopper  
senior  
moment  
Sudoku  
hornbag  
dishlicker  
witlof  
cyberstalking  
Naltrexone  
pear-  
shaped  
Bioterrorism  
yakitori