

It is already the 15th of December—where has the time gone? Maybe it's because of the warm weather, or the simple fact that I am living in Japan, but I almost can't believe that Christmas is coming so soon. On the surface, Christmas seems to be very similar to what I'm used to at home. Even so, I think that the spirit of Christmas and the way that it is celebrated in Japan is very different.

From what I've seen on TV, in the stores and from my friends, Christmas in Japan seems like a romantic holiday to spend with your boyfriend or girlfriend. When I hear Christmas music in the stores here, it is often different from the music that is popular at home. Songs with lyrics like "Last Christmas I gave you my heart" and "All I want for Christmas is you" seem to be the most popular. On the other hand, the music that is most often played at home has lyrics like "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow," "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" or "There's no place like home for the holidays." I think this reflects the different feelings that people have about Christmas in each country. The music I hear in Japan is all about love, whereas the music that we listen to at home is about the winter weather, and spending time with family and friends.

It seems weird for me to imagine Christmas as a romantic holiday. Christmas at home isn't so much a one-day holiday as it is a whole holiday season that is mostly centered on family and friends. Even people who have been dating for years are usually not together on Christmas because everyone goes home to spend time with their own family. The holiday celebration usually lasts all through December with Christmas parties and different activities with friends, but when it comes to be Christmas Day, everyone is at home with their family. I have always spent about two weeks with my family at Christmas doing things like decorating the Christmas tree, making Christmas cookies and just enjoying time to relax together at home before the New Year begins and everyone goes back to work. In Ohio and a lot of other parts of the country, there is usually cold winter weather around Christmastime, so we often get snowed in and can't drive our cars on the icy streets. It's so nice to be inside during the cold weather, or take a nice walk through fresh snow on a winter day. Even though Christmas has religious origins, the religious part of the celebration is not usually too important in the United States. My family always goes to church on Christmas Eve, but aside from this tradition, we don't think much about the religious aspect of the holiday.

Now there are only 10 days until Christmas. In Japan, there is holiday music playing in the stores, Christmas decorations and I'm giving Christmas-themed lessons at school but something is just not the same. Since Christmas was originally a

Christian holiday, most people would think it's logical that it is more important at home. I figure I only have a short time to live in Japan, and still many years ahead of me to celebrate Christmas the American way. This is why I decided to stay in Japan and see how Christmas and New Year's celebrations are different from what I've done every year at home. I'm looking forward to the upcoming holidays in Japan and I am willing to accept the fact that there will be no snow, but I still can't get my favorite Christmas song out of my head: "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams..."