

When I was very little, I remember my family having a set schedule for the holidays. Christmas Eve at my grandmother's, Christmas morning at my aunt's and presents with my immediate family at home, a few days later.

But, as my siblings and I grew up, those plans changed. My parents divorced. Teenagers with jobs that required holiday hours. Boyfriends and girlfriends whose families also had to be accommodated. My father, to his credit, remained flexible with the holidays. He would shift the celebrations around to accommodate the ever complicating schedules.

I haven't returned to the US for Christmas in years. Thanksgiving generally passes without a trip either. It's not that I don't want to spend time with my family but those holidays are often so hectic for them that the time isn't as enjoyable as a few random weeks in March or October. And with the weather being so unpredictable in the winter in the northern part of the US, it's any other time of year seems like a better time to visit.

Despite not spending the holidays in a Norman Rockwell-esque setting, I still find them very enjoyable. I've carved out my own traditions. I still bake Christmas cookies, like my grandmother used to, but with friends and neighbors. I designate the holidays to get caught up on my reading (six books this year, plus months worth of magazines, etc.). Nothing makes you look forward to a holiday than planning to spend an afternoon in your pajamas on the couch with a good book.

I understand the instinct to be disappointed or melancholy about spending the holidays away from family. It's one of the many prices we pay as internationals. But we can make our own traditions, unique ones with blending of local cultures. Write a poem for your Christmas gift exchange with friends or bake speculaas cookies instead of sugar cookies.

Experiencing the holidays as something mutable, with traditions which shift based around the needs of the people who celebrate them, set me up for an easy adjustment now that I live abroad. Try Christmas in July instead and don't run the risk of getting snows in at the Detroit airport.