

*P:* I would say doing holidays away from home especially Christmas is the very hardest thing for me about being an expat by far. However, this time around doing the expat thing in Taiwan it's been helped by the fact that we work for a company that's founded and run by an American who really values the holidays and does a lot to bring the feeling of the holidays to Taiwan, into our company. So our company is filled with holiday decorations, and have holiday events and we have a holiday party and we have holiday music – all of those things make it feel like it really is Christmas, even if I'm not home for Christmas. Not being home not being with family is still hard, but at least it doesn't feel like I'm also missing the season and the whole holiday celebration.

*J:* Right. Or the fact that she invited to department to go to Mongolian barbecue for Thanksgiving, which is not a traditional Thanksgiving meal but at the same time it was all about all of us getting together and being thankful that we were eating together, which is very much in the spirit of Thanksgiving.

*P:* And in that same weekend – we have a really great group of expat friends who also have a nostalgia around Thanksgiving. And so we had a Thanksgiving meal where we invited people over to bring, to make Thanksgiving style, at least fall foods. And all of those things help make you feel like you're still getting some of that experience even though you are away from home and away from the States.

*J:* Well now that's a good point because we haven't just been here in Asia for our traditional holiday extravaganza. We were also in Costa Rica for a long period of time. Costa Rica was the first place where Christmas truly felt weird because it was super sunny and warm and hot and there are no evergreen trees. So, our Christmas trees ended up being potted Palm plants which are not the same, but they're still pretty impressive if you manage to figure out how to light them up with Christmas lights.

*P:* Yeah, my first Christmas in Costa Rica with Josh we bought a cacao tree. So it was a potted chocolate tree and then we picked spicy red peppers and used them to string the tree with. So we called that our hot chocolate tree. That was my favorite memory of that Christmas. Although, if we're honest I was pretty miserable like Christmas. That was my first Christmas away from home. It was hot and sunny and it was the busiest tourist season, and everything about that did not feel like Christmas to me except for that hot chocolate tree. That did give me some joy but overall it was pretty miserable. That was a real hard time.

*J:* I would say that being away from your home or especially your home country missing those big traditional family celebrations of holidays, or just the really familiar ways to kind of take those moments out of the year to really enjoy being together with other people is really difficult. I would imagine that's true for anyone no matter what country they come from, going to another country where they don't celebrate maybe the lunar New Year or whatever holiday it is...

*P:* Right, whatever holiday it is that in your home country is a really big deal and you have a lot of traditions around it – both like close in a home with your family so you are missing home. And then in the broader culture and maybe even in like the weather and all the things that come together to make that particular moment so special. It can be really not just disorienting but like lonely or sad to not be in that...those moments that mean so much to you back in your home country.

*J:* Now the upside to everything being so global is that now... modern age it's not unheard of for expats to be able to figure out ways to get nostalgic items to people in other countries. So maybe before you would have to get a care package from you family shipped overseas which would take who knows how

long. Now, you might be able to go to the import section of a foreign supermarket chain that's in whatever country and find like canned cranberry sauce for example.

*P:* Like we did for Thanksgiving.

*J:* Or in Costa Rica there was a super special underground railroad that would provide canned pumpkin, for pumpkin pies.

*P:* Nice. I wasn't a part of that. I had to bring it down way in advance. I would bring it down when I'd come in the summer knowing that I'd want it in the fall for Thanksgiving.

*I:* Well because you didn't know all the people who lived in the upscale part of Escazu.

*P:* Yeah that's true. Well, I lived in a tiny little village that was pretty out in the middle of nowhere so that made a difference.

*P:* That's true and many times when you live in other countries, you'll live in places really kind of really cut off from any sort of expat community. Which really is kind of the point of going to live in another country, right? But I think you'll also find that sometimes, especially if you're living in an area for an extended period of time, you end up kind of making connections with other expats to be able to support each other a little bit in moments like Thanksgiving, or whatever.

*P:* Although I do think there's something really smart about anticipating the holidays pretty far in advance. So you do like bring down some decorations, or particular food items or little things that you know either will be difficult to get or are very specifically nostalgic for you when it comes to decorations or things. That will help at least turn your home into a place it feels like you've brought your home country or home celebration experience to your new home.

*J:* That's a very good point especially if you're going to an area where there is very little possibility of being able to find like an international supermarket chain with a good import section. That you really do have to think about those things well in advance to really feel like a taste of home.

*P:* Well and then in my family whenever I go home to be with my family, we usually leave some gifts. Like I leave some gifts back at home with my family for them to open for Christmas and they'll send a couple back with me. I keep them for the whole however 6...9 months until it's Christmas because I wanna have something that I can physically open from them. And a lot of times we'll also just send a package of cards that are just kindof for like a rainy day... sometimes it's like specifically like open Christmas Eve open on 4th of July weekend or something like that. And other times it's just like open when you're lonely open when you're wishing you were home and it's...

...That's a very good point.