



Morgan Parker is a 38-year-old Australian who left a career in property development to found Wheel2Wheel, a non-profit organisation that highlights the needs of lesser-known charities throughout Australasia.

He raised awareness of the charities by embarking on a 25,000km motorbike ride, setting off from Hong Kong in March last year and riding through 10 countries in 125 days, visiting a different charity in each location. The trip was filmed by an accompanying film crew and screened on the National Geographic channel recently.

A nasty childhood memory helped bring home to him the real meaning of Christmas. One Christmas Eve in Brisbane, when he was about six years old, Parker was in the family car with his parents, squabbling with his brother and sister on the back seat.

"I can't even remember what we were fighting about, but it irritated my father so much that he pulled the car over to the side of the road, and he said, 'if this continues, you're not getting any Christmas presents tomorrow,'" Parker recalls.

Undeterred, the children continued. But to their shock, when they awoke on Christmas morning, their father had kept his promise. They drove to the Royal Brisbane Children's Hospital, where the three children had to give away all the presents they had received to the terminally ill children in the hospital.

"It obviously had a profound impact on us at the time, but in hindsight, a few days later, we'd done a great thing," Parker says. "It left a really strong impression on me to this day. I think we felt we understood Christmas for the first time, about giving and about sharing."

It's a message Parker has carried with him and now puts into practice with his nine-year old daughter, with whom he has established a Christmas tradition that focuses on family and on giving to those less fortunate. Their routine starts on December 1, when he and his daughter put up the Christmas tree together. Then, in the run-up to Christmas, he and his daughter go carolling. "We sing Christmas carols at home, and we usually volunteer to sing carols with a community group in a street or a hospital."

Although he is divorced, he spends Christmas morning with his family. The arrangement works well, prioritising the parents' wish for their child to have a happy family Christmas. Then one parent takes her for lunch and the other for dinner.

The meal varies according to the location, with Parker spending Christmas in one of three places - at his home in Noosa, Queensland, with a sumptuous seafood meal and chilled white wine consumed on the beach; in Hong Kong with traditional turkey and red wine; or somewhere else in the world.

This year, he will spend Christmas in Hong Kong. Rounding off the celebrations, Boxing Day has its own traditions for Parker. "As an Australian, Boxing Day is all about the cricket," he says without hesitation. He sits in front of the television, surrounded by tasty leftovers from the day before, and devotes himself to armchair sportsmanship, watching the Melbourne Boxing Day test and the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. ■

I'M DREAMING OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS

Even the hardest of road warriors yearn for their traditional holiday comforts, writes **Liana Cafolla**

Grant Thatcher, founder of *Luxe City Guides*, got what was probably his best present when he attended a party in Singapore in 2001 and announced plans to visit Bangkok, where he had previously lived. He was promptly handed several sheets of paper listing the Thai capital's most trendy addresses for eating, shopping and entertainment.

It was a list that Thatcher himself had compiled after countless

friends had besieged him for advice on where to go and what to do in Bangkok. Now, it had made its way back to him.

Describing it as a "light bulb moment", Thatcher realised he was on to a good thing and started to painstakingly develop and market his miniature city guides, which are now a standard in the travel sections of most book shops.

He has lived in Hong Kong since 1996, but his best Christmas memory stems from his mother's thoughtfulness when he was a young boy growing up in Bristol in England.

"My mother quite rightly felt that the day after Christmas was a bit of a letdown for kids, so she had this ornate toy sleigh that she would fill with small wrapped gifts and trinkets and, after lunch on Boxing Day, she would bring it down off the mantelpiece and we would all receive a small present to unwrap," he recalls. "It was like having Christmas all over again."

Since then, some things have changed quite a lot for Thatcher. Nowadays, instead of chilly Bristol, he spends Christmas in his Pok Fu Lam home with his partner and their dogs, but he dreams of a white Christmas.

"If I had my way, there would be snow in Hong Kong and a nice big log fire," he says.

Despite the lack of real cold, Thatcher's Christmas is still filled with the traditions of years gone by. Christmas is, firstly, "a time for reflection and thanks, a time for family and friends, for giving, and for looking forward and welcoming a new year", he says.

In preparation for the big day, he fills his home with nature-inspired decorations, which he uses in place of Christmas tree. "I'm a nut for Christmas decorations and so it changes every year, but there is always a ton of foliage and berries," he says.

He's no couch potato during the holiday, preferring to be active and outdoors. On Christmas Eve, he goes Scottish dancing and attends a church service with carol singing. On Boxing Day, he feasts on bubble and squeak with turkey, and then walks it all off on the Dragon's Back.

The big day itself starts with Thatcher in the kitchen, where he spends a good part of the day cooking a traditional turkey dinner. It's a meal he enjoys so much he doesn't just make it for Christmas.

"I love turkey and we have a full Christmas dinner at least two or three times a year," he says. "You can't beat it."



City Guides founder Grant Thatcher. Photo: Jonathan Wong