

CULTURE IN THE *mix*

Ensure your holiday season remains festive by blending old and new traditions

By Lisa Evans

Pakistan, Azfar Rizvi and his family were invited to experience their first Canadian Thanksgiving this year in the home of a couple he met through CultureLink, a volunteer program supported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada that links newcomers with Canadian volunteers. "I got to hear about why the turkey is done the way it is, the kind of stuffing and the kinds of desserts [people traditionally eat]," he says. While he enjoyed the food, it was the meaning of the holiday that resonated with him the most. "It's the same emotion that we experience in our own culture where we have to express gratitude for the blessings that we have," he says.

Rizvi loved the holiday so much, he incorporates elements of Canadian Thanksgiving into his traditional Muslim Eid al-Adha festivities in late October. "Thanksgiving is a celebration through a meal and Eid is also a celebration through a meal," he says, although pulling off the event will require some changes.

"We never eat a bird at Eid, but this time I suggested let's get a big bird and see if we can invite some of our Canadian friends," he says. Rizvi's Eid celebration featured turkey and stuffing borrowed from Thanksgiving, and sweets traditionally eaten at Eid. The only problem? "We just needed to find a good spot on the table for both curry and maple syrup."

Cox says blending elements of home country traditions with Canadian celebrations can help newcomers feel connected to both cultures. Diana Livia says she enjoys incorporating elements of Christmas from her home country of Peru into her Canadian celebrations.

"In Peru, the big Christmas celebration is on Dec. 24. During my life in Canada, I have always celebrated that night with my Peruvian friends. We call it *Noche Buena* or good night," says Livia. Borrowing turkey from Canadian Christmas and combining the dish with traditional Peruvian tamales, Livia and her friends create a special holiday celebration that is unique to them. Livia later

spends Dec. 25 with her Canadian husband and his family, and enjoys baking traditional Canadian sweets. "In Canada, there's a lot of baking, so I love preparing cookies, cakes and experimenting with some new ingredients," says Livia.

Embracing new traditions can help to make your life in your new country more colourful and cement a connection to the culture. When starting new traditions, Cox recommends engaging as many of the senses as possible through music, incense, decorations, food and hands-on activities. "The senses make things memorable," she says, and allow the experience to be a more active one. Giving guests and family members a role in the celebration, such as lighting a candle, helping to cook a traditional meal or helping to decorate the house, forges a personal connection to the event and a lasting memory that helps cement the tradition into your new Canadian lifestyle.

Livia encourages newcomers not to lose their traditions, but to blend them with Canadian customs. "I think Canada embraces all cultures and we all love the idea to have diversity around celebrations," she says. 🍀



December is a festive time of year for most Canadian families. You may hear co-workers and friends discuss roasting a turkey, trimming the tree or playing Secret Santa. While the holidays may bring about feelings of sadness in newcomers who feel some of their most precious holiday traditions have been lost in the move to their new country, ensuring the holiday season remains festive simply requires a bit of creativity and a blending of the old with the new.

Meg Cox, author of *The Book of New Family Traditions*, says traditions are an important part of our psychological and social well-being as they reflect our embedded beliefs and values and provide us with a sense of identity and belonging. When celebrating traditions in a new country, Cox recommends analyzing the true meaning of the holiday and blending elements of your culture to feel a sense of connection to your homeland while still participating in the festivities of your new country. "If you can connect with [the meaning of the holiday], then you can mix your own elements in and still celebrate," she says.

After immigrating to Canada from