

## Australia Tour – Day 1 – Monday February 23<sup>rd</sup> – Depart USA



Today Marcia and Jim and Marie and Kal start our three week vacation to Australia. This will be the seventeenth international trip that the four of us have taken together over the past thirteen years. Marcia and Marie are sisters and the four of us really enjoy traveling together!

Today (and tomorrow) will most probably be the

longest travel days we've experienced on any of our trips; Australia literally on the "other side of the world".

Australia is the only island that is a continent and the only country that occupies an entire continent. Australia covers 3 million square miles; only slightly smaller than the continental United States, it is the world's sixth largest country. Its 24 million inhabitants are mostly the ancestors of the original settlers from Britain and speak English. Australia is known for its friendly people and unique plants and animals. It lies in the Southern Hemisphere, to the south of Southeast Asia, so we will be in Australia during their late summer...a nice break for us from this long winter!

Australia has always been at the top of our list of places to visit.

One of our favorite vacations was to the neighboring country of New Zealand in 2010. We've always had fun when we've had "Aussies" traveling with us on some earlier tours (New Zealand, Alaska, and a couple of tours in Europe). I have happy memories of having a snowball "fight" with Aussies on a snow covered top of a mountain in Switzerland during our trip there in 2007. Not only had most of them never seen snow (and had a hard time making a proper snowball) having not grown up playing baseball or American football, their throwing motions were not good! I prevailed!

Marcia and I leave our home in Pittsburgh mid-afternoon and catch an hour-and-a-half flight to Chicago. Marie and Kal fly out of Dayton and meet us in Chicago for a four-and-a-half hour flight to Los Angeles that departs Chicago at 5:13 PM.

After a three hour layover in Los Angeles we board our flight to Australia at 10:50 pm PST (1:50 AM tomorrow to you good folks back East). We are flying on Qantas, the "Airline of Australia". We are on a sixteen hour (!) flight from LA to Melbourne Australia. We are flying on the largest passenger airplane in the world, the Airbus A380. It is a four-engine double-deck wide body. It has a 10,000 flight range and can hold 850 people in a "one class" configuration. Our plane holds "only" 525 passengers in a three-class layout. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we are flying in third (steerage) class.





Above is a picture from the internet of a Qantas A380 flying over Sydney Harbor and above the iconic Harbor Bridge and Sydney Opera House. We will be in Sydney Australia for the last three days of our tour!

## **Australia Tour – Day 2 – Tuesday February 24<sup>th</sup> – In Route**

Today starts just after Midnight with the four of us on the first hour of a long 16 hour airplane flight from Los Angeles to Melbourne Australia on a huge double deck Qantas Airbus A380.



Now, this is somewhat complicated: Although we are on a 16 hour flight it will be two days before we land in Australia. We left Los Angeles late on February 23<sup>rd</sup> but will not land in Melbourne until the morning of February 25<sup>th</sup>. This is because we will be flying across the International Dateline (shown in blue on the map at left).

We will “gain that day back” when we return to the USA on March 16<sup>th</sup>. We will fly out of Sydney, Australia at 10:45 AM and land in Los Angeles four hours earlier at 6:30 AM. I guess we will not “age” on that flight!

We decided that we wanted to go on an organized tour of Australia rather than trying to travel on our own for several reasons. We feel we learn more and get better value for our money on an organized tour in foreign countries. Also, the sheer size of the country and the fact that they drive on the left hand side of the road contributed to our decision to book a tour.

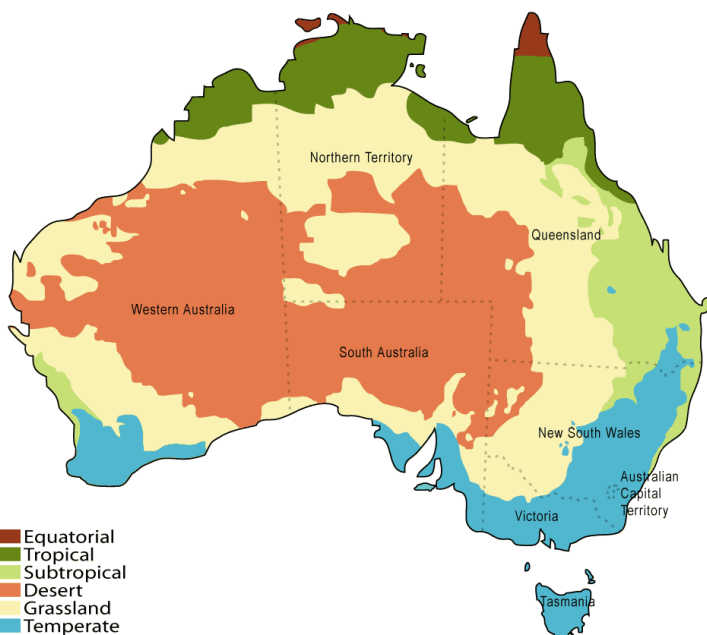


We had a hard time finding a tour with an itinerary we liked. Then, Marie found "Overseas Adventure Travel's" *Ultimate Australia Tour*. As shown on the map we will start the tour with a five day pre-tour extension on the Australian island state of Tasmania. We will then fly to Melbourne for three days, visit Adelaide for two days, fly to Alice Springs and Ayers Rock for three days, then on to the Port Douglas area where we will spend a day at the Great Barrier Reef and another day in the Daintree Rainforest. We finish with three days in Sydney.

We will cover over 6000 miles in our travels around Australia. We will have six internal commercial airplane flights.

This will be the first time we have toured with Overseas Adventure Travel although we had heard about them for years and they always get good reviews. They are based in Cambridge MA and specialize in small group, active tours marketed mostly to American Seniors. We have been impressed with the pre-trip information they have sent to us. We know that there will be 11 travelers on the Tasmania pre-trip extension and a total of 16 of us on the Australian mainland portion. All are from the USA.

Ten days before the start of our travels we all received an informative e-mail from the lady who will be our Tour Director, Sandra Dann. A native of Sydney, she introduced herself and sent along good information on what to pack and what to expect. She also asked us to send her any information about special needs or any special events we wanted to experience. This is the first time we ever received correspondence from a Tour Director prior to a tour.



Australia's size gives it a wide variety of landscapes with tropical rainforests in the north-east, mountain ranges in the south-east, south-west and east and dry desert in the center. Most of the population is clustered in cities on the east and south coasts. It is the least inhabited and driest inhabited continent with the oldest and least fertile soil. We expect summer temperatures highs in the mid-70s in the southern areas rising to the 90s in the central desert and the northeast tropical area. Nighttime lows should be 20 to 30 degrees less.

## **Australia Tour – Day 3 – Wednesday February 25<sup>th</sup> – Tasmania**

Prior to our departure for Australia we studied up on its history. Here, briefly, are some interesting historical facts we wanted to know and understand before we start exploring the continent:

-Human habitation of the continent is believed to have begun about 45,000 years ago during the “Ice Age” when the seas were lower and people migrated on land-bridges and by short boat trips from South-East Asia. These are the ancestors of the Aborigines. They remained “hunter-gathers” as opposed to becoming farmers or fishermen.

-The first sighting by Europeans of the continent was by Dutch and later English sailors in the 1600s. In 1770 James Cook sailed along and mapped the eastern coast and claimed it for Great Britain.

-In the 1780s Great Britain’s jails were overflowing with what were basically petty criminals. With the loss of their American colonies in 1783 they had no place to “dump” what they considered their Irish, English and Welsh underclass. In 1780s the British Government sent a flotilla of ships, called in Australia the “First Fleet” comprised of prisoner ships and a few containing Marines and Administrators to Australia to establish a Penal Colony. The voyage took 8 months. Many of the prisoners died on the voyage. They landed near present day Sydney at “Botany Bay” on January 26, 1788, a date which is celebrated as Australia’s National Day.

-The rich, lush land described by Captain Cook in 1770 (he was apparently there during a rare wet spell) was not evident. The next twenty or thirty years were hard, with more deaths, fights with the aborigines and an economy fuelled by cheap rum from India. Convicts were basically sentenced to 7 or 14 year terms as “indentured servants” working for the government building infrastructure or for “free settlers” as farm hands and herders. After serving their terms they became free men and women. Crimes committed during their terms would cause them to be placed in prisons on Norfolk Island or in Van Diemen’s Land (present day Tasmania).

-Over time, subsequent generations and the addition of “free settlers” produced the people of today’s Australia said to be maybe the most enterprising, jovial and charming in the world.

-I have been told that Australians are very sensitive to having it portrayed that all of their ancestors were drunken, promiscuous convicts. I look forward to discussing this phobia with many of the Aussies we will be meeting!

\*\*\*\*\*

Our 16 hour flight from Los Angeles to Melbourne Australia in Economy Class is incredibly long but turns out to be more comfortable than anticipated. With the economy section only about one-third full all four of us feel we were actually able to get a few hours of some sleep. The cabin service, food and seatback entertainment system are all good.

At 9:40 AM our Qantas flight from Los Angeles lands in Melbourne Australia. We quickly clear customs, collect our checked luggage, meet our Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT) Tour Director, Sandra Dann, the other seven members of the initial part of our tour and check in for our flight to Hobart, Tasmania.



Tasmania is an island state of Australia. It lays 150 miles off the southeastern coast of mainland Australia. We are looking forward to our five days touring Tasmania as it is said to have geography, scenery, plants and animals unique from those in other areas of Australia. Total population of the island is less than half a million people.



At 12:20 PM we board a Boeing 737 for an hour-and-fifteen minute flight across the Tasman Sea to Hobart Tasmania.

We have learned that Hobart is the capital of the Australian state of Tasmania. It was founded in 1804 by the British as a Penal Colony. Today Hobart has about 220,000 residents.

As we leave our plane and walk into the terminal we are all “sniffed” by a friendly beagle being controlled and watched by security folks. Later, when our checked bags come up on the carousel the dog jumps on each one and sniffs it. No, he

was not searching for illegal drugs but rather for any of the fresh food products (like fruit) that Tasmania bars from entering their country. They are concerned about matters such as seeds from foreign fruits or plants coming into Tasmania enabling invasive plant species to sprout and grow unchecked.

At 2:30 PM we check into our hotel for the next two nights, the Best Western. Our Tour Director gives us one hour to unpack and take much needed showers and then leads us on an hour-and-a-half walking tour one of the historic areas of Hobart. We think she is taking us on this walk to prevent any of us from trying to take a nap before dinner! Anyway, the city and harbor area are quite nice.

All of the Aussies that we've met so far are, as expected, very friendly. We just need to adjust to

their slang phrases and accent So that we can always understand them!





The weather is excellent. This is late summer in the Southern Hemisphere and we are now in the most southern and coolest part of Australia (nearest Antarctica) but it is clear and sunny with temperatures in the mid-70s.

At 5:15 PM we leave the hotel for another walk through an historic area, the Old Whaling District. It contains old houses and structures from the 1830 when Hobart was a whaling center. We then walk to the Shipwrights Arms Hotel for an excellent included Welcome Dinner.



We take taxis back to our hotel and, exhausted, quickly fall asleep. And we are exhausted. If we don't count the few hours of sleep that we may have enjoyed on the plane flight from the USA, we estimate that we have been awake for 46 hours since we all woke up in the USA last Monday morning.

## **Australia Tour – Day 4 – Thursday February 26<sup>th</sup> – Tasmania**

We wake up feeling rested after our first night of sleep in Hobart, Tasmania Australia.





After breakfast we leave our hotel at 7:45 AM for a walking tour of the historic old section of Hobart. We meet our guide, Bill Brundle of Historic Hobart Tours who takes quite a shine to Marcia. For the next hour-and-fifteen minutes Bill takes us on a most informative and humorous walking tour.

We walk through St. David Park cemetery and see the burial site of Hobart founder (1803) David Collins. Next we view many of the original Georgian style buildings including the building housing The Royal Ancient Tennis court, the Athletic Club, first court house, and the original State House.



It is fun watching residents of Hobart walking to their jobs downtown. Hobart is extremely clean. We see no litter and the air is clear. 100% of their electrical power comes from hydro electric generators and they sell excess, via a cable to the mainland. Also, Bill says no flies here, unlike on the mainland! We really enjoyed Bill and this tour.

At 9:45 AM Marie, Kal, I and five other members of our tour group depart on an optional tour of Port Arthur. We have learned that Port Arthur served as a prison colony for Britain and mainland Australia between 1830 and 1877. As many as 12,000 convicts were confined in the prisons at Port Arthur over those years. These convicts were most all convicts originally transported from England and Ireland to mainland Australia and who had committed another crime in Australia and were then sent to isolated Port Arthur.





We leave Hobart in an 18 passenger mini-van with our Tour Director Sandra and driver/Tour Guide Gordon (who will be with us for these next four days in Tasmania). We will drive 65 miles from Hobart to the end of the Tasmania Peninsula. On the two hour drive we initially see pastures with sheep and cows and some farms growing crops. Then we enter the more mountainous park area and stop to take pictures above Pirates Bay.

We next stop at

Eagle Hawk Neck, a narrow strip of land connecting the peninsula to land. Here, at night, the British would chain 18 dogs to alert sentries if they detected any prisoners trying to escape to the mainland.

We drive down to Pirates Cove and see the rock cliffs near Devil's Kitchen. The scenery is quite nice.



We reach the Port Arthur Historic Site at 11:50 AM. Sandra and Gordon secure our tickets while we have a light lunch in the Visitor Center's cafeteria. The weather all day has been delightful; mid-sixties with sun and clouds.

At 12:30 PM we join one-hundred-and-fifty others waiting to meet their guides for a walk of the grounds. We are delighted when the eight of us are assigned to a private guide that our tour company had arranged for and the remaining 150 were divided between the two other guides.

Our guide, Graham, is a most charming fellow and does a great job covering the history of Britain's convict transportation to Australia and life at the Port Arthur prison. We see the ruins of the main penitentiary, the "silent" prison, and view one of the isolation cells.





About an hour into our tour it starts to lightly rain. This works out OK, as at 1:40 PM we all board a motorized, enclosed catamaran.

For the next half-hour we motor around the deep water harbor and receive more commentary. We view the "Isle of the Dead" where around 1100 people were buried at the settlement's cemetery between 1833 and 1877. We see the "Point Puer Boy's Prison" which operated from 1834 to 1849. This was designed to separate the juveniles being transported from Britain from the adult prisoners. Most of the boys were between the ages of 14 and 17 but some were as young as 9.







We view the replica of the ship Endeavor, representative of the type of sailing ship that would transport convicts from Britain to Australia, a trip that could take as long as eight months.

We learn that convict transportation to Port Arthur ended in 1853, just about the time that Britain stopped transporting prisoners overseas. The Port Arthur prisons remained in operation until 1877 mostly housing rapidly aging and some mentally ill prisoners.

Sandra. She walks us to an isolated spot stands honoring a tragic event. In this area, a lone gunman "wishing to become automatic weapon and killed 35 people and wounded 19 others. He was captured, consecutive life sentences. Throughout the has never been revealed. He is referred to This is to deny him his wish of "becoming ownership laws were changed after this

We return to the docks and are met by our Tour Director



where a small memorial on a Sunday in April of 1996, famous" brought an (32 tourists and three staff) tried, and received 35 trail and to this day his name as "the man with no name". Australia's gun incident.

We finish our time in Port Arthur viewing a history and in an excellent museum further

good movie covering its documenting prisoner life.

We leave Port Arthur at 3:15 PM and arrive at 5 PM. Marcia opted not to go on the the day exploring Hobart, shopping, and relaxing.

back at our hotel in Hobart Port Arthur tour and spent

Dinner is on our own tonight. At 6 PM the four of us meet and walk around some more of Hobart to find a restaurant with an open table. We enjoy a good dinner at Murphy's Irish Pub down by the waterfront.



## Australia Tour – Day 5 – Friday February 27<sup>th</sup> – Tasmania

This morning we check out of the Best Western and begin an all day trip across Tasmania from Hobart on the southern coast to Cradle Mountain National Park in the northwest.

At 8:30 AM we arrive the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary said to be Tasmania's most popular wildlife park and a sanctuary for injured and orphaned wildlife. We enjoy seeing some unique animals that are extinct everywhere but in Tasmania. We observe them hand feeding an eight month old baby Wombat whose mother was killed on the road. We watch other baby Wombats eat their breakfast. Wombats are marsupials. Marsupial babies are born very immature and after birth crawl into a pouch near their mother's belly and stay there and nurse for several months.

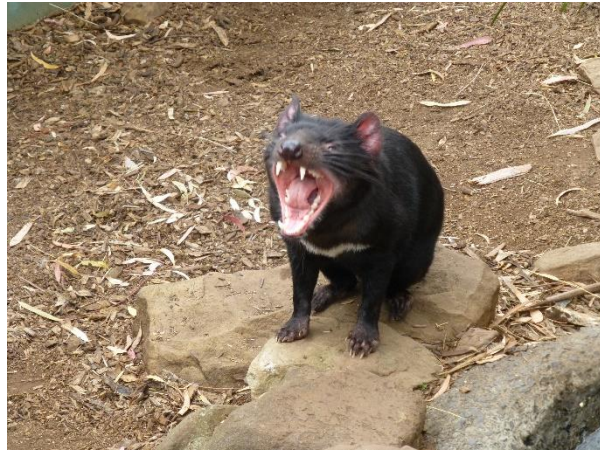


We see and pet some friendly Kolas.



Next we view the Tasmanian Devil, an endangered species that is rarely seen. At the Bonorong Sanctuary they are bred. Normally they would have been released into the wild. However, due to an aggressive cancer within the wild population, those in sanctuaries are kept within the sanctuaries. We are told that Tassie Devils are not aggressive but dangerous. OK...I believe....down boy!





We now head into the Kangaroo area which holds about sixty kangaroos. We have a great time watching them hop around. We feed them food from our hand. We take great fun in feeding the mothers with a baby's head sticking out of the pouches!



We next see a rare Echidna. Echidnas are monotremes which means that they are mammals that lay eggs. The sanctuary also has a number of interesting tropical birds native to Tasmania. We especially enjoy "Fred" a talkative cockatoo who is over 100 years old! He is very active. He talks up a storm (with an Aussie accent) and attacks Marcia's coat when she is posing for the picture below. In the former British



Empire folks reaching their 100 birthday receive a letter from the Queen of England. Fred's is proudly displayed in front of his cage.



We have really enjoyed our visit at this wildlife sanctuary. We depart and continue on our trip to Cradle Mountain. It has been overcast this morning but now the sun breaks out and temperatures start rising to 70 degrees. We pass through rolling hills and see some areas planted in crops. None of us can guess what it is. Our guides tell us it is high strength opium poppies! 55,000 acres are under cultivation. The poppies will be sold to a nearby Johnson & Johnson plant that makes medical drugs. Most of the other pieces of land seem to be supporting sheep.



At 10:45 we stop in the town of Oaklands and view their restored wind powered 1836 flour mill and some nice gardens.





We stop and view a bridge that was built in 1836 and still in use on a major road. It was designed by an architect and built by convicts.

We make a rest stop in Ross for a tea break and then travel on to Deloraine for lunch. Both of these are interesting old country towns.

After lunch we start heading up into the mountains.



Here is a picture of our eighteen seat Toyota mini-bus with Kal, Marie, Marcia and driver/guide Gordon. With thirteen people inside and all of our luggage in the trailer it is towing, it does slow down quite a bit going up the winding mountain roads. The terrain reminds me of the high peaks area of the Adirondak Mountains in northern New York.

The weather continues to be fine with temperatures in the mid-60s. Australians consider tomorrow to be their last day of summer; equivalent to our August 31<sup>st</sup>.

We are enjoying our fellow traveling companions. They are well-traveled and fun

to be with. This is our first trip with OAT but most have traveled with them before. This is the fifteenth trip for fellow traveler Tom.

We check into the Cradle Mountain Lodge where we will be staying for just one night. Our accommodations are great. We are each in a cabin heated by a gas fireplace.





Our cabins are surrounded by native animals, mostly two types of Wallabies (a small species of Kangaroo) and Wombats. At 5:30 PM we all go on a guided nature walk around the grounds. We see animals but learn mostly about some of the unique Tasmania trees and plants.



We enjoy an included gourmet dinner. Most of us have their excellent steak fillet.



At 9 PM, just after sunset, our group of eleven jump into the lodge's safari vehicle and are taken on a guided "Night Spotlight Tour". John, our guide, drives into the national park and uses a hand-held spotlight to locate wildlife near the dirt road we travel. We see wombats, wallabies, and many possum as John explains to us their nocturnal habits. The highlight is when we briefly spot a fleeing Tasmanian Devil. John says spotting them in the wild is very rare.



## Australia Tour – Day 6 – Saturday February 28<sup>th</sup> – Tasmania



This morning we enjoy an included buffet breakfast before we check out of the Cradle Mountain Lodge after a one-night stay.



Today we spend the morning in Cradle Mountain National Park, part of Tasmania's World Heritage area. We have been told that 45% of Tasmania's land area is in National Parks and Preserves. The weather today is not the best. It is cool with occasional drizzle.



We take two separate forty-five minute walks through parts of the park. In both cases we are walking on boardwalks, steps, or over bridges. This protects the land and us. TD Sandra gives us information on some of the unique plants and trees. We occasionally see animals.

We next drive to Dove Lake where we hope to get a good view of the park's signature symbol, Cradle Mountain standing



5069 feet high.





Above, on the left is how Cradle Mountain looks on a clear day. Unfortunately we do not have a clear day. Above on the right is what we see!



At Dove Lake Marie and Kal take a thirty minute hike to the old boat house on the northern edge of the lake.

I take a fifteen minute walk along the south side of the lake to the top of a large boulder "lookout" point. There I almost plunge to my death when jostled by a group of Japanese tourists pushing to get photos of each other.

Marcia steps out of the motor coach and walks around for a while, determines the weather has not improved, and goes back in and relaxes with her audio book.

Gustav Weindorfer (1874 – 1932) was an Austrian immigrant to Australia who championed the preservation of the Cradle Mountain area. His vision led to the creation of the National Park and the saving of the trees from the timber interests. We visit a replica of the cabin he built and lived in, much like a hermit, for many years. We view his gravesite (note the wallaby feeding at the lower right of the picture).



We leave the park around noon and drive towards today's destination, Launceston. We stop for lunch at Sheffield.



We are traveling through rolling hills and farmland mostly dedicated to sheep and cattle.

We arrive in Launceston, our home for the next two nights, around 4 PM. Launceston is the second largest city in Tasmania with a population of 106,000.

We check into the Best Western Plus. Later the four of us walk to a nearby Italian restaurant and enjoy a good dinner.

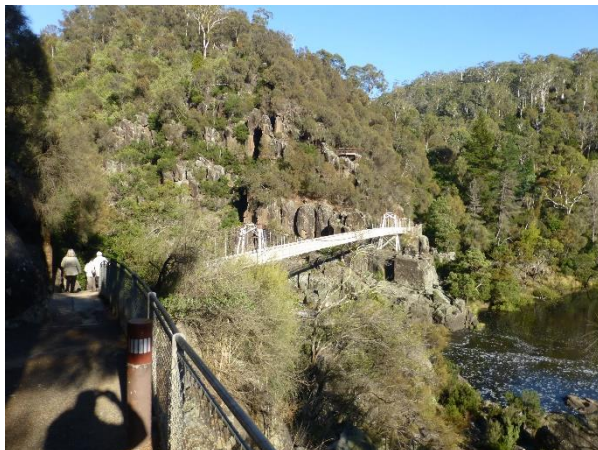
## **Australia Tour – Day 7 – Sunday March 1<sup>st</sup> – Tasmania**



We awake this morning after the first of two nights in Launceston. We have learned that Launceston, founded in 1806, is the second largest city in Tasmania with 106,000 folks.

After breakfast we depart on a half-day tour of Launceston.

We first go to Cataract George, a scenic spot with high vertical cliffs stretching along the sides of the South Esk River. It is also within the city limits and is a favorite recreation area for residents. We walk for an hour on an elevated walkway and cross the George over the Alexandra Suspension Bridge. We see wallabies and peacocks.







The weather today is perfect; sunny and in the 60s. We head back into town and tour the older, historic city center.

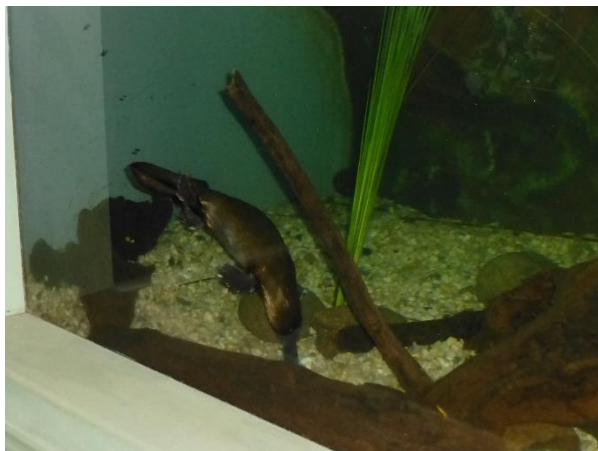


At 10:30 AM our city tour ends. Marie and Kal spend the rest of the morning and early afternoon on a long walk around the city. They visit four parks, the conservatory, and duck pond.

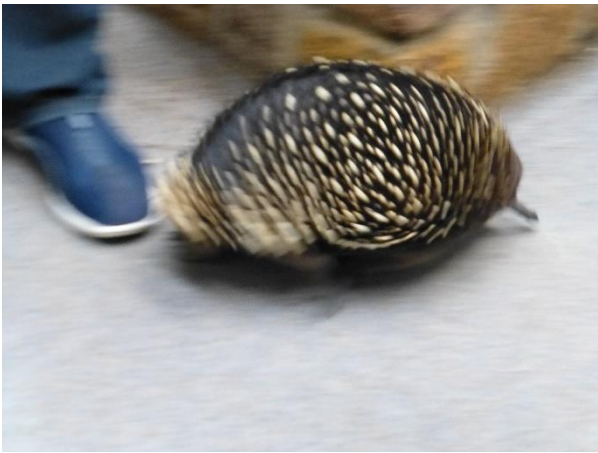
The rest of our group travel north with our tour director and driver for about forty minutes driving along the bank of the Tamar river.

At 11:30 AM we arrive at our destination, the Platypus House.

Here we learn about two rare monotranes that are found only in Australia. Monotranes are mammals that lay eggs but also suckle their young. We first view a very interesting movie showing activity inside a platypus burrow. Then the naturalist discusses the uniqueness of the platypus; a duckbill, fur, web feet and the male has a venomous spur his right foot.





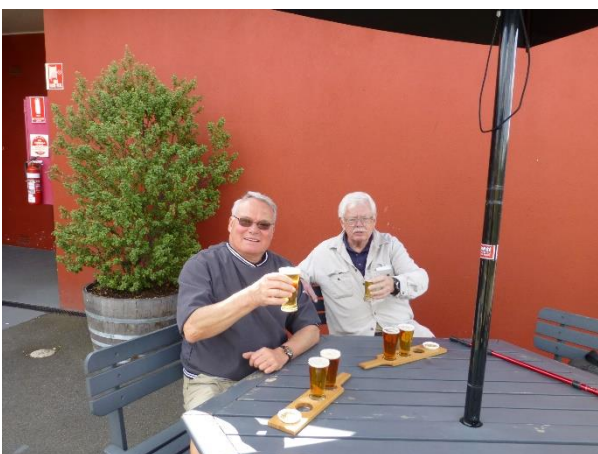


We then go into two separate rooms where we can watch platypus swim through the glass side of the tank and then one where we can view them swimming from above.

Then it's into the Echidnas room where these ant eating cuties walk around our feet.



We drive about a mile and have our lunch at a local fish and chips stand looking out on to the Tamar River. On the way back to Launceston we stop at Brady's Lookout and get another view of the Tamar.



Back in town at 2:30 PM our driver drops Tom and myself off at the Boag's Brewery. Tom, who is from Manhattan Beach CA, has a collection of over 700 beer steins and wants to add one to it. As we are at the brewery we decide to sample some of their product.

Tom and I walk back to our hotel passing Albert Hall.

Marcia has walked to a local park and had an enjoyable time viewing the Japanese Masque Monkeys.

Returning to the hotel I find that

Our group has a good dinner at a nearby Pizza/Pasta restaurant.







Here's a photo of the Japanese Masque Monkeys – Mother & Baby.

## **Australia Tour – Day 8 – Monday March 2<sup>nd</sup> – Melbourne**

After breakfast we check out of the Best Western hotel after our two night stay in Launceston, Tasmania, Australia. We found this Best Western, as the one we stayed in at Hobart, most acceptable. Nothing fancy but they both had comfortable king size beds, good showers, good restaurants for breakfast, free Wi-Fi (purchased for us by our tour company, OAT) and very good locations near restaurants and the central city. Our five days in Australia's island state of Tasmania were great!

We fly out of Launceston at 10:50 AM on a Qantas DHC-8 for an hour-and-ten minute flight to the city of Melbourne on the southern coast of the Australian mainland.



More than 80% of Australians live within 60 miles of the coast and most all of them in large cities or their suburbs. Australia has one of the world's most urbanized coastal populations.

We have learned that Melbourne is the capital city of Victoria State (population 5,713,000) and is the second most populous city in Australia with 4,500,000 folks. It is regarded as Australia's financial center and



is regularly at the top of the list of "The Most Livable Cities in the World". The city was established in 1835 as a "free state" (with no convicts or convict labor). We are looking forward to our visit here. We will be staying for three nights.

Our OAT "Tasmanian group" of eleven (plus two husbands who were off trout fishing in Tasmania) check into our hotel for the next three nights, the Travelodge. We are on the top, thirteenth floor, and have somewhat of a nice view from our rooms.



Tour Director Sandra takes us on an orientation walk around our hotel and points out some restaurants. The four of us have a light lunch.

At 3:30 PM the group meets and Sandra takes us on a mini-tour of the central business district.

Melbourne is a "city of trams" and she wants to show us how to board the free streetcars that traverse city center.



It is apparent to us that Melbourne is a very multi-cultural city. It also is a young city.

We take a tram towards downtown and exit near the Chinese shopping district. Melbourne has a very large Chinese population. It is also said to have the second largest Italian population outside of Italy and the third largest Greek



population outside of Greece. The city is crowded but very clean.

The weather today is great. In the seventies with mostly sun.



We walk to the State Library of Victoria and enter it. It is packed with mostly students from the nearby universities.

Sandra takes us to the library's second floor and through an art exhibit of paintings depicting the history of Australia and Melbourne.

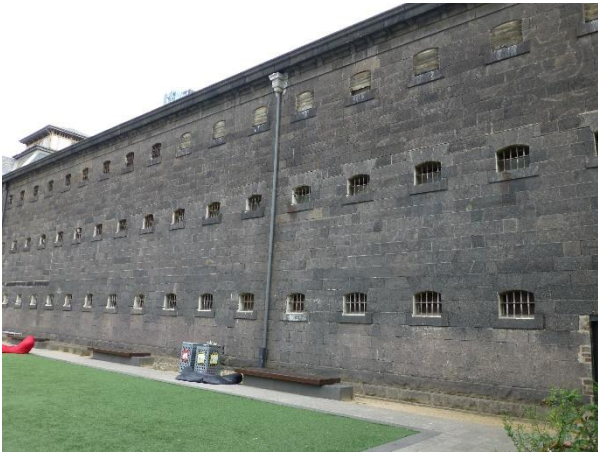


We go to the third floor and view the massive dome that towers over the central part of the library. When it was finished in 1911 it was the largest steel dome in the world.

At 6 PM we meet and walk to a nearby restaurant for an included "Welcome Dinner" and it is excellent.

## **Australia Tour – Day 9 – Tuesday March 3<sup>rd</sup> – Melbourne**

At 8:30 AM our group of 16 departs for a tour of the city of Melbourne. Melbourne was a planned city laid out in grids and is fairly easy to navigate. Our first stop is Drummond Street where we view ornate houses from the 1860s and 70s. Melbourne was a very rich city at that time due to the Gold Rush of the mid-1860s.



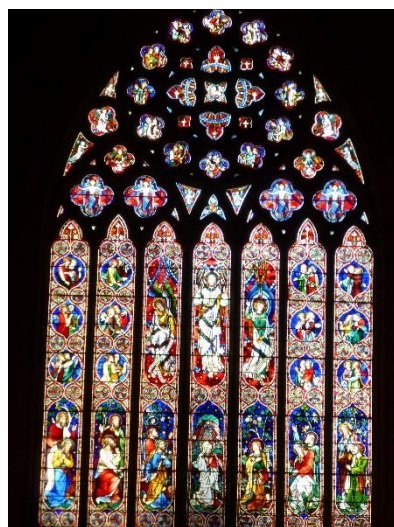
Then we are off for a guided tour of the corridors and dark cells of the Old Melbourne Gaol (Jail). It was built in the 1840s and 50s. 135 unfortunate convicts were hanged here in the 1800's including the infamous "Bushranger" (a bandit or criminal that would hide in the bush, steal cattle and rob passerbys) Ned Kelly. We see Ned's death mask, the hanging area and a replica of the suit of armor he made to try to break away when he was cornered by the police.







We see the original courthouse, constructed in 1911 and then drive to the Exhibition Hall built in 1879. Next is St. Patrick's Cathedral whose construction was started 1868.



We now drive through central Melbourne. We see the State Houses of Parliament, which served as the Australian national seat of government for a time. Melbourne and Sydney have had a bit of a rivalry over the past two centuries including which city would be the national capital. Much as it happened with the



District of Columbia in the USA, Australia established a "capital district" and built from scratch a national capital and seat of bureaucracy in Canberra, located between Melbourne and Sydney.

We next drive through the Sports and Entertainment Precinct. This was the home of the 1954 Summer Olympics. It now houses the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the Rugby Pitch, and, most importantly, the Rod Laver Tennis Arena and the other stadiums and courts that host one of the four major tennis tournaments, The Australian Open every January.



On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1901, the six colonies occupying the land area of Australia federated, forming the Commonwealth of Australia. Although they still considered themselves British Subjects, Australia was an independent country. We stop at Federation Square which commemorates the establishment of the country. We view the original train station.

After a tea break we drive out to The Shrine of Remembrance, Victoria's war memorial. It was



built by the citizens of Victoria state in 1934 to commemorate the Australians who fought in the First World War.

In 1914 Australia joined Britain and the Allies in fighting WWI. Australians took part in many of the major battles fought on the Western Front. Of the 416,000 who served (out of a population of only 4 million), 60,000 were killed and another 152,000 wounded. Many Australians are said to regard the defeat of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) at Gallipoli in Turkey as the birth of the nation; its first major military

action. April 25<sup>th</sup> is celebrated in Australia and New Zealand as ANZAC day; the date of the initial landing on the Gallipoli peninsula. This April will be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The exhibits and memorial were especially moving for the four of us as we had visited Gallipoli last October on our tour of Turkey and visited the ANZAC cemetery and saw the impassable cliffs that the ANZACs were tasked with trying to take.



Our city tour ends at 2 PM. Our motor coach then drops folks off at various spots. Marcia, Marie and Kal get off at the Botanical Gardens which they tour. They then walk along the river and return to the hotel around 5 PM.



I had planned to go to a car museum but TD



Sandra determines that it is closed today. I go back to our hotel and do some laundry in the hotel's washing and drying machines and then take a walk past the main sports stadium and down to the dock area. Weather today has been perfect. Clear and in the mid-70s.

Dinner is on our own tonight and the four of us walk to HOF, a nearby German restaurant and enjoy some good German food.



## Australia Tour – Day 10 – Wednesday March 4<sup>th</sup> – Melbourne



Today is our last day in Melbourne. OAT has planned this as a free day...no planned tour events.

We've decided not to pay to go on the OAT offered optional "Kangaroos and Koalas in the Wild Tour" as reviews we have read about it were not all positive and we have already seen much wildlife at the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary on Tasmania and we will be going to the Cleland Wildlife Park in Adelaide tomorrow. The four of us prefer the countryside, scenery and wildlife over big cities. Marie suggests that we try to get on a tour of Australia's "The Great Ocean Road". Tour Director Sandra sets it up for us.

We will be touring west of Melbourne along the coast in the direction of Adelaide.

The four of us are picked up in a mini-bus at our hotel at 7 AM and transported to Federation Square where we board a large double decker Gray Lines motor coach. It has ten seats below and forty-six seats up top. We are able to secure seats on the left hand (the coastal) side of the motor coach.



We depart Federation Square at 8 AM and head west. Our driver and tour guide is Russell. He gives us excellent commentary in a most pleasant voice. He tells us we will be driving 330 miles today on our all day tour. We pass through the western suburbs, an industrial area, and then farming areas.

At 9:30 AM we reach the start of the Great Ocean Road. We stop at a rest area and Russell fixes us Billy Tea, Lamington Cakes and crackers and Vegamite.

We start our drive up and down cliffs, on winding roads, with the Southern Ocean on our left. We make frequent photo stops. The views are great.



Russell tells us about the many shipwrecks that occurred along Australia's southern coast in the 1800s. We pass through Shrapnel Point and Marcia spots a couple of Koalas in the gum trees. We stop for photos at Cape Patton, 300 yards above the ocean.





Next stop is Apollo Bay for lunch. We all have fish-and-chips.

After lunch we head a little way inland and drive for one-and-a-quarter hours through a temperate rain forest. At 2:30 PM we emerge from the forest and again see the Southern Ocean.

We enter Port Campbell National Park and stop for fifty minutes at The Twelve Apostles. These are spectacular limestone formations left standing in the ocean by a retreating coastline. We go down walkways for the best view. It is very windy!!





We next drive to Gibson's Steps where you can descend to the beach.



We drive to Loch Ard George and see more great formations.



The scenery is really unbelievable.





At 4:40 PM we stop at Port Campbell for a half-hour rest and refreshment break.

Then we start back on a two-and-three-quarter hour ride, on interior roads, back to Melbourne.

Russell shows an old motion picture, on the motor coach's TVs, that was filmed in Victoria "The Man From Snowy River". It is about the start of cattle farming in Victoria in the 1880s.

We get nice views of the Melbourne skyline as we cross the two mile long bridge and enter the city. We are dropped off

near our hotel at 8 PM. We really enjoyed this excursion. Our driver/guide was excellent, the coach most comfortable and the pace of the tour was perfect.



## **Australia Tour – Day 11 – Thursday March 5<sup>th</sup> – Adelaide**

After three comfortable nights in Melbourne we check out of the Travelodge and are taken to the airport where we catch a 10:15 AM flight on a Qantas Boeing 737 for a one-hour flight to Adelaide where we will be



staying for two nights. We set our watches back one-half hour as Adelaide is in a different time zone.

We have learned that Adelaide is the capital of the state of South Australia (population 1,650,600). It is the fifth largest city in Australia with a population of 1,300,000.

Unlike many of the other major cities in Australia, it was settled in 1836 by “freely settled British” and not by convicts transported from the home country. It enjoys a prime location between the Lofty Mountains and the Southern Australian Ocean. Adelaide was laid out as a “planned city” in a neat grid pattern with many squares and parks. It is in a very dry region. Our driver cannot remember when it last rained...some months ago!

Tour Director Sandra wants to teach us the rules of the sport of Cricket, as the Cricket World Cup is now underway in Australia and New Zealand. We stop at the beautiful Adelaide Oval stadium to watch a few minutes of a local cricket match but find that the match has been moved to another stadium.



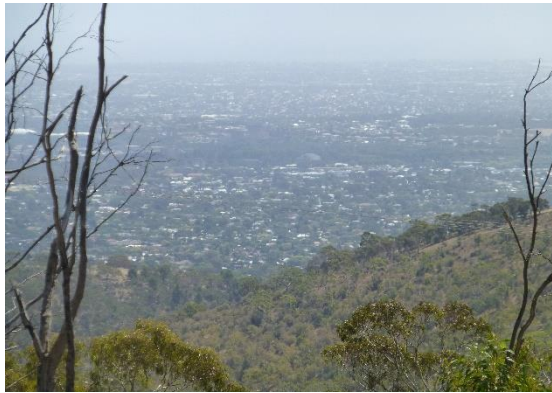
We drive up into the mountains to the Cleland Wildlife Park. We first have an included lunch in their cafeteria and then have time to walk around the park where we see many Potoroos roaming the grounds, Kangaroos (some taking naps), Koalas, Wallabies, a Tasmanian Devil, a Monitor Lizard, a Dingo (Australia's wild dog), and all kinds of birds including Ibis, Emus, baby Ducks, Black Swans and Pelicans.







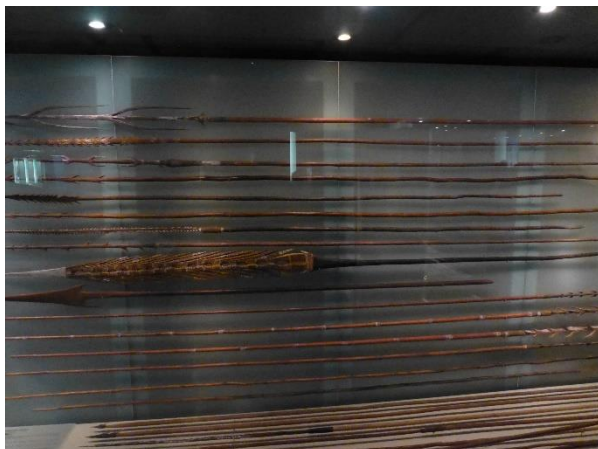




Fellow traveler Tom pays a few extra bucks and gets his picture taken holding a koala. Koalas, like kangaroos are marsupials; their babies are born very immature. Koalas sleep up to twenty hours a day and eat the rest of the time!

We get nice views of Adelaide from the highlands. The weather is perfect. Sunny and in the low 70s.

At 4 PM we stop at the Museum of South Australia where Sandra leads us through an exhibit on the native inhabitants of Australia, the Aborigines. We will be learning much more about the Aborigines during the next few days. We see examples of their hunting and cooking implements, an aboriginal boat and good information on their culture.





We check into our hotel for the next two nights, the Grand Chancellor, which we've read on Trip Advisor is centrally located adjacent to Adelaide's "Red Light District"!

Tonight we will experience a Home-Hosted included dinner with a local family. This is something kind of unique that our tour company OAT (Overseas Adventure Travel) does on each of their tours. As this is the first time we've traveled with OAT we are not sure what to expect.

Sandra divides us up into two groups of eight each. We leave the hotel at 6 PM and are dropped off at two houses. Marie and Kal are placed in the other group.

Marcia, I, and the other six travelers in our group are warmly greeted by Jilia, a retired lady, and her neighbor and friend Barbara. We are welcomed into her home.



We enjoy drinks on her deck and are introduced to her very well behaved but massive two year old Irish Wolfhound. She shows us around her recently renovated house. The main part of the house is a one hundred year old cottage to which a large addition, including a new kitchen, has been added.

We sit down and enjoy an excellent dinner of salad, an interesting chicken over wild rice ala Jilia as main course, and an ice cream and strawberry parfait for desert. We have good dinner conversation about their life in Australia and ours in America. A special treat happens when her eight year old twin granddaughters are unexpectedly dropped off for babysitting. We all have great fun talking with them.



Our mini-bus driver picks us up at 8:30 PM to return us to our hotel. We pick up the other group of eight including Marie and Kal. They also report having an excellent time at their hosts, a retired couple.

## **Australia Tour – Day 12 – Friday March 6<sup>th</sup> – Adelaide**

Today is our last full day in Adelaide. Tour Director Sandra has arranged for us to meet this morning with an acquaintance of hers, an Aborigine named Lindsey.



We meet with him at 8:30 AM for an hour of very interesting discussion with many questions and answers. The first thing that we learn is that in aborigines the "white" gene is dominant in deciding skin color. Even a relatively small amount of "white" blood can result in children with white skin. Lindsey's father was a Scotsman. He passes around pictures of his two boys and they certainly do look Caucasian.

We learn that there are only 700,000 aborigines remaining in Australia. They lack the enzyme to process sugar. Western style food and alcohol have led to a high rate of kidney disease and the need for constant dialysis. Average life expectancy is 50 years. They are less than 3% of the population but represent 28% of the males in prison and 35% of the females.



Lindsey discusses racism, the difference between the cultures, the mistakes the Australian government has made in dealing with aborigines, the welfare cycle and the bias against education in some aborigine communities. He passes out to us several informative handouts and answers many questions in a most frank manner.

At the end of his presentation Lindsey offers some of his prints for sale and we happily buy one.

Rather than hang out next to Adelaide's Red Light District we decide to sign up and pay for an optional wine tasting

day trip to the Hahndorf & Barossa Valley.



Fifteen of the sixteen folks in our tour group sign up for this optional. We are picked up at our hotel at 9:30 AM by driver/guide Ashley and his comfortable twenty person capacity mini-motor coach. We head up into the hills east of Adelaide, an area that receives more rain than the city. We all enjoy Ashley's constant commentary. He is extremely knowledgeable and talks in a pleasant manner.



At 10:20 we stop for an hour in Hahndorf, an interesting colonial era town settled in 1839 by 189 Lutherans from Prussia (northeastern Germany). We enjoy walking the streets and going into the shops.



Back on our motor coach Kal admires the special Australian bush hat that Marcia bought in Hahndorf. It has corks hanging from the brim to "shoo away the flies" we expect to encounter tomorrow in central Australia.

We drive through the Adelaide Hills to the Barossa Valley where we stop at 12:45 PM in the town of Angaston. Here we visit the Sorby Adams Vineyard's "cellar door" wine shop for some wine tasting and a lunch of local Barossa meats, cheeses, fruits and vegetables.



Next we drive to the top of a high hill to an overlook for a nice view of the Barossa Valley. Our next stop is at the Seppeltsfield Vineyards for more wine tasting.



After the wine tasting at Seppeltsfield Ashley stops the motor coach and takes a group picture in front of vineyards. He then has us look closely at the vines. They are quite unique. The vines are 150 years old (as testified by the thick trunks). This is because Australia has none of the aphids or phylloxera that kill off vines



in Europe and the USA after a decade or so. These vines never receive any irrigation; there is not a lot of water around here. Hence, the number of grapes per vine is relatively small but the flavor is very concentrated. Because of the wild shape of the vines grapes must be handpicked, not machine picked. Other vineyards south of here get \$300 per ton for their grapes. Here, they get \$2000 per ton.



Our last wine tasting stop is at the Murray Street Vineyards. This is our favorite stop. Great setting and many different, excellent wines to sample.

We return via an expressway to our hotel, arriving at 6 PM. Shortly thereafter the four of us depart on a walk down Rundle Street, a main shopping area, to find a restaurant for dinner. The street is packed with partying people on a Friday night. Also, many “buskers” (street performers) and some with some pretty professional setups. We find a restaurant and enjoy pizzas, returning to our lodging around 9 PM. Check out the guy on a unicycle with his

buddy on his shoulders juggling torches.



## **Australia Tour – Day 13 – Saturday March 7<sup>th</sup> – Alice Springs**



Today we leave Adelaide for the “Outback” of Australia.

Our Qantas Boeing 737 departs Adelaide at 11:20 AM for a two hour flight to Alice Springs. We fly over hundreds and hundreds of miles of empty desert. On our flight we pass into Australia's Central Time Zone so it is 12:20 PM when we land.

As shown by the red arrow on the map at left Alice Springs is in the geographical center of



Australia and is also in the arid, outback desert.

We have learned that Alice Springs is in Australia's Northern Territory and has a population of only 28,605. It was founded in 1872 as the location of a Telegraph Repeater Station on the new telegraph line between Adelaide and Darwin on Australia's northern coast.

We drive into town from the airport past some rugged hills. We find Alice Springs to be surprisingly green and are told they have had more than normal rain. We pass over the Todd River and see that it is bone dry. It is cooler than normal; only about 80 degrees with a nice breeze. We check into our hotel for the next two nights, the Chifley Resort.



At 1:30 PM we are taken to the Todd Mall for lunch and souvenir shopping.

We then start our tour of Alice Springs. We first visit the Royal Flying Service which uses aircraft to provide medical care to small settlements scattered hundreds of miles apart in Australia's vast outback. We watch an informative movie and walk through their museum. Founded in 1928 they now fly sixty-one planes, all Pilatus – PC12s, single engine turbo props that can take off in short distances from dirt runways.





In addition to flying nurses and EMTs to remote locations in the Outback to evacuate accident victims and sick folk to city hospitals they also support a phone-in diagnostic service and transport doctors to remote villages for clinics.

At 4 PM we visit the museum honoring the Old Telegraph Station. We have an excellent local guide and learn that in 1870 Australia was cut off from telegraph communication with the rest of the world. It would take months via ships to get a reply to an urgent inquiry. In 1871 a telegraph line was completed up the heart of Australia from Adelaide to Darwin, linking up with an undersea cable to Indonesia and the rest of the world. Telegraph signals weaken with distance and a "Repeater Station" was needed to listen to the incoming Morse code messages and resend. This spot was chosen because water was discovered. We see the original buildings and the original Alice Spring.

We also learn about the "stolen generation", half-caste aboriginal children (with mostly white skin due to the white gene for skin color being dominant in aborigines) who were taken from their mothers and sent to the cities to be brought up by white families.



We also view some interesting birds.





We enjoy a casual included dinner of Australian cuisine with "bush tucker" influences. Entrees are Kangaroo Medallions, Baked Barramundi (a fish) and Pasta with Camel Sausage. We continue to really enjoy being with the other folks on this tour.



Just another great day in Australia. We have fun picking on Lynn.





## Australia Tour – Day 14 – Sunday March 8<sup>th</sup> – Alice Springs



We wake up after our first of two nights in Alice Springs in the remote Outback of central Australia. We are in Australia's Northern Territory. Despite its large area of 520,902 square miles its population of only 233,300 makes it the least populous of Australia's eight major states and territories. Alice Springs has only 23,000 residents.

At 8:20 AM we depart on an optional tour of the Desert Park Aboriginal Cultural Center. The weather is cooler than normal and just perfect. It is about 75 degrees and sunny right now. We arrive at the park and get good views of the MacDonnell Mountains.

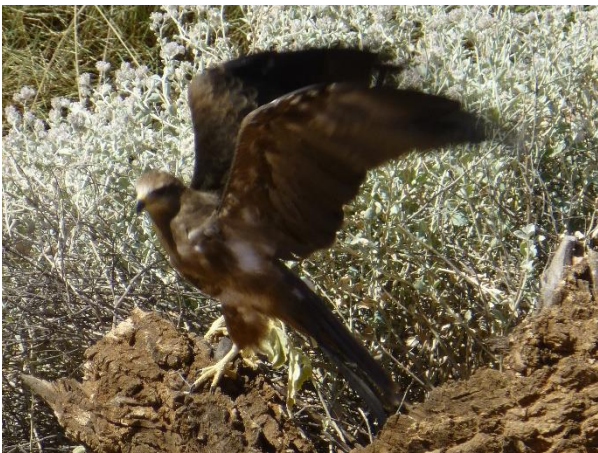


We meet our private guide, Renata, and start our walk through the Park's outside nature area and see plant species unique to Australia's outback. We see the Australian Bustard bird. We also learn more about the Aboriginal culture from Renata, an Aborigine, and she shows us the weapons and implements Aborigines made from iron wood.





We sit down in an open amphitheater and enjoy a Birds of Prey show. A Bush Tail Curlew walks through us and a Falcon and Kites fly just over our heads.



We next walk through their large "Nocturnal Animals" building. Our guide highlights these animals that are normally only seen at night with a red light. We see a Bilby, a marsupial, and a Knob Tail Gecko. We end our visit with a movie about the region we are in.





After an unfortunately hurried lunch we go to the Reptile Centre, home to the largest reptile display in Central Australia. We pet the Blue Tong Lizard and play with Barry, an Olive Python. Play ends when Barry starts crawling up Marcia's sleeve. We see many more reptiles. Favorites are the Bearded Dragon and the huge Australian Saltwater Crocodile.



We learn that Australia has the most things in the world that can kill you; ten varieties of poisonous snakes, spiders, box jellyfish, the blue ringed octopus, stonefish, and sharks, and crocodiles.





Next we visit the School of the Air which is a unique educational group that teaches 122 children living in remote areas of the outback. They use computers, video, phone and fax to tutor these children from kindergarten through ninth grade. After ninth grade the children normally will leave their parents and the Outback for boarding schools in the city.

We next stop at a supermarket and buy food for the cookout that Tour Director Sandra has arranged for tonight.



We are back at the hotel a little after 4 PM and I enjoy some time in and around the hotel pool. It is now sunny and in the high 80s but more comfortable than what they say the weather is usually like around here.

We all meet at 6:30 PM and have a great cookout on the lawn outside of our hotel while the sun sets.



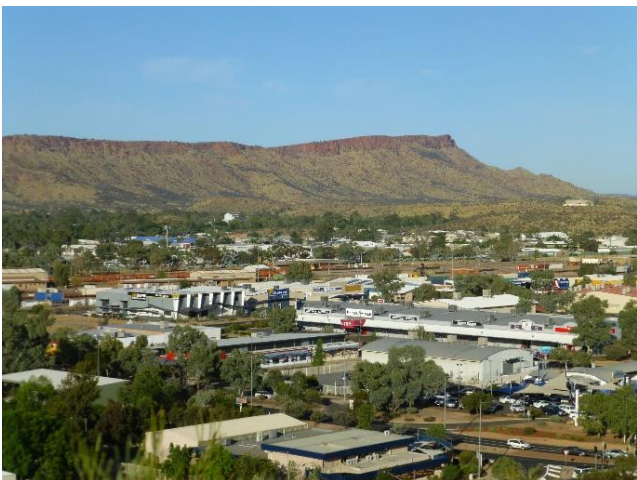




## Australia Tour – Day 15 – Monday March 9<sup>th</sup> – Ayers Rock/Uluru

We check out of the Chifley Resort after a two night stay.

At 7:30 AM we depart for what we believe will be one of the highlights of the tour. We will drive to Ayers Rock, called *Uluru* by the aborigines. But we first stop near our hotel at the mostly dry Todd River. Then we drive up to Alice Springs' ANZAC Rock where we view the monument to the soldiers and get a nice view of the town.







We head out on a large comfortable mini-bus for a 350 mile seven hour drive across the Australian Outback. We are surprised at the number of trees and the amount of green that we see. We are told that we can expect terrain like this all the way to Ayers Rock. We are not really in the Australian desert. This region receives about twelve inches of rainfall a year and the plants that grow here have adapted. The trees have deep roots and their leaves look more like needles so that they don't evaporate too much water. We are told that the road is mostly flat and straight the whole way and that there will be only two turns.



We spot a few wild camels. We are told that camels are first brought to Australia in the 1840s by explorers who had found the water supplies in the Outback too far apart for their horses. Later more are brought in to transport supplies between towns. When the railroads are built the camels are no longer needed. Their handlers are asked to return to the Middle East and to shoot their camels before they leave. Instead, the handlers release them into the wild. With no predators and their ability to eat 80% of what grows in the outback they have multiplied, There are an estimated 400,000 feral camels today in Australia and they have become somewhat of a pest in certain areas.

Traffic is extremely light. At 9 AM we see our first inhabited building. It's Stewart's Mill where we stop for a rest break. We check out their Dingo and Wallabies. They also offer camel rides and Marcia enjoys hers.







At 10:30 AM we make our next rest stop at Eildunda and observe their Emus. Back on the road everyone seems to be enjoying the scenery except Kal.



Fellow traveler Lynn passes out to each of us sheets she has brought along that list all of the countries in the world. She asks us to check off the ones we have visited. Artie is the winner; she has visited sixty-three. The four of us were in the mid-to-high thirties.

At 12:30 PM we stop at a lookout and view Mt. Conner, twenty miles away, and a dry salt lake.

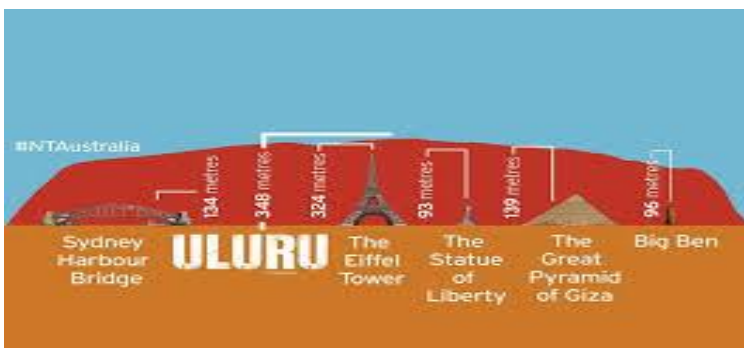




We have an interesting stop for lunch at Curtin Spring Station where we learn about life on an authentic outback cattle station from Great Grandmother Sylvia.



Sylvia tells us how the 1600 square mile (!) ranch was founded in 1956 and built up to what it is today. She passes around hundreds of color pictures that add to her narrative. The ranch normally has between 3500 and 5000 cattle being raised for meat. They have diversified into offering meals and lodging for tourists. It's not an easy life operating a ranch in the Outback



We are back on the road at 2:15 PM. We have learned that the continent of Australia has been called the "flattest continent". Unlike New Zealand, Australia does not really have many large mountains. It also does not have many major rivers. Australia's most recognizable natural landmark is Ayers Rock/Uluru. It is a large sandstone rock formation rising out of the flat desert floor. It rises 1142 feet above the desert floor and is just about six miles in circumference. It is said to change colors with the angle of the sun, especially at sunrise and sunset.

It was first discovered by Europeans in 1873. The first tourists visited in 1936. Today over half a million tourists visit each year.





We arrive in Alice Springs at 4 PM and check into our hotel for just one night, The Outback Pioneer.

We meet our driver/local guide for the next two days, Isaac, and immediately head out to Uluru. Isaac drives around "the rock" and then we stop and take a forty-five minute walk around the base of Uluru, the Kuniya Walk.

As predicted the flies are terrible but the nets we wrap around our heads or hats like Marcia's with things dangling from the rim to scare away the flies seem to help.

We see aboriginal cave art but Isaac tells us it is only about one-hundred-and-fifty years old.

Uluru is impressive. The Australian government gave Ayers Rock (now mostly called by its aborigine name Uluru) back to the indigenous people in 1985 in what is known as "The Handback". It is still a national park but it is run by a twelve person Board of Management that must contain eight aborigines from the local tribe (four men and four women). The board has decreed areas of Uluru sacred and in those areas no photos can be taken. We take another forty-five minute walk. Flies are there to greet us. It is about ninety degrees with low

humidity.







At 6:15 PM we drive to the Sunset Viewing area. Aborigines are there selling their art work and we have a private table set up for our group of sixteen. We enjoy Champagne and snacks.



We are here, of course, to watch the sunset and watch the colors of Uluru change hues. We are not disappointed. The sun sets at 7:09 and we are rewarded with spectacular views. This a most memorable event.







We arrive back at our hotel around 8:30 PM. Most of us go to the Outback Pioneer's informal open air restaurant and have a light dinner.

### **Australia Tour – Day 16 – Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> – Uluru to Cairns**

We are up early this morning and at 5:15 AM drive out to Uluru to watch sunrise. We make one stop to view the stars and a nearly full moon but there are too many broken clouds to really identify any constellations. We reach the viewing area. A table has been set up for us with snacks, coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. We walk to the viewing area and witness a spectacular sunrise at 6:45 AM and the changing hues of Uluru.







To the left of Uluru and further back we can also see the rising sun shining on Kata Tjuta. We will be going to this rock formation later this morning. We return to our hotel for breakfast, stopping to photograph a rare rainbow.



We check out of our hotel and arrive at Kata Tjuta. Isaac tells us that it is actually longer, wider and six-hundred feet higher than Uluru. We walk around the base of the massive sandstone formation and see the sculpted effects of millions of years of erosion by rain and wind. We take a forty minute hike up the valley between the first and second mounds, the Wind Walk. A nice breeze is blowing in our faces but it does not keep the flies away!





It is hot. 91 degrees but only 18% humidity.

We drive to the Cultural Center and spend forty-five minutes touring this museum. No pictures to show as the aborigines prohibit all photos both inside and out.

We have lunch and then drive out to the Ayers Rock Airport and board a Qantas Boeing 717 at 3:20 PM for a 2-1/2 hour flight to Cairns. We arrive early in Cairns at 6:00 PM. We are now back in Australia's eastern time zone and turn our watches ahead thirty minutes. During our flight I take pictures from the aircraft of a dry salt lake bed east of Ayers Rock, Australia's desert, the greener and more mountainous Queensland in the east and the Pacific coast as we approach Cairns.





Cairns, founded in 1876, is a city of 160,000 in Australia's northeast state of Queensland. We next drive for 40 miles north up the coast to Port Douglas a town of 3200 people. It is dark, raining lightly and it is very warm, close to ninety degrees, and humid. We check into our hotel for the next three nights, The Pullman Sea Temple Resort. We have been expecting these accommodations to be the best of our trip and we are not disappointed. We take Tour Director Sandra's recommendation and Marcia does our laundry in the huge whirlpool spa in our bathroom! (Note from Marcia – this is the most labor intensive laundry I have done in my life. I imagine it's almost as much fun as beating the clothes on

rocks. But the clothes are beautifully clean.)



Tomorrow will be another big day. We go to the Great Barrier Reef!

## **Australia Tour – Day 17 – Wednesday March 11<sup>th</sup> – Port Douglas & The Great Barrier Reef**

Today will be the highlight of our trip. We are scheduled to spend the day on the outer banks of the Great Barrier Reef!

We are enjoying breakfast at the beautiful Pullman Sea Temple Resort in Port Douglas when word spreads that all excursions to the Great Barrier Reef have been canceled for today due to a Category 1 Cyclone churning well off shore.

Tour Director Sandra comes around to each of our tables and confirms the bad news.



We all meet with her in the lobby at 9 AM. Sandra tells us that the reef excursion folks will make a decision later today about whether they will run tomorrow. If they do, we will go tomorrow to the Great Barrier Reef and miss out on the scheduled visit to the Daintree Rain Forest. If they cancel tomorrow we will still go to the rain forest.

Sandra offers the option of relaxing all day at our hotel. This is rejected by all, as the weather is overcast and rainy and nobody wants to sit around our isolated resort all day in the rain.

She offers us the option of driving down to Cairns today and going up on the Kuranda Gondala. She passes around a brochure and we agree this is our best option. We will meet at 11 AM and depart for Cairns.

Below is a picture of our hotel entrance and just part of the huge swimming pool that occupies the central areas of the resort.



At 11 AM we board a mini-motor coach and drive south for an hour to Cairns. We pass many fields of sugar cane. This wet, warm area of Australia is also where most of their fruit, peanuts and vegetables are grown. It is raining so our view of Four Mile Beach is what you see below, on the right, and not what I pulled off the internet on the left.





At Noon we reach the attraction and ascend on a gondol to 1788 feet. Views are not great due to the rain and clouds but we did get to watch a large female Golden Orb Spider eat a male Golden Orb high in the rafters at one of the gondola stations. This may be one of the highlights for today. We ride above the Wet Tropical Rain Forest and see the Barron Falls. At 1:30 PM we are drive to a small town for lunch and shopping.







At 3:15 PM we depart for our hotel. It is pouring. Sandra has received word that all trips to The Great Barrier Reef for tomorrow are canceled. On well, we still have the Daintree Rainforest to look forward to tomorrow.



Now, for some of us (like me!) The Great Barrier Reef was at the very top of the list of things we were looking forward to experiencing in Australia. Here is some information about the reef and what we will be missing:

It is the world's largest coral reef system composed of 2900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching for a length of 1400 miles over an area of 133,000 square miles. The reef complex is visible from space, as shown in the satellite photo at the left.

After breakfast we would have boarded a large catamaran and motored for an hour-and-a-half to the outer reef (middle top in the above picture). Here we would have docked at a permanent structure where we would spend the next four hours. There are underwater viewing areas in the permanent structure that give great views of the

reef and the many varieties of tropical fish. There is also a glass bottom boat that motors around and over the reef and a semi-submersible submarine with glass sides.

I would have spent most of the time snorkeling and having fun trying to get good pictures of the fish with my old waterproof camera. We would have had an included lunch and returned to our hotel in time for dinner.

The weather conditions prevent our trip to the reef. Even if the catamaran could manage to brave the waves and swells to get to the reef and the permanent structure I am sure that the churning water would make for very poor snorkeling. The waves would be bothersome and the water murky.



We continue our drive back to our hotel and it continues to rain. Sandra now announces that our planned trip, tomorrow, to the Daintree Rainforest has been canceled. The Daintree River is flooding and the ferry we would use to cross the river will not be running.

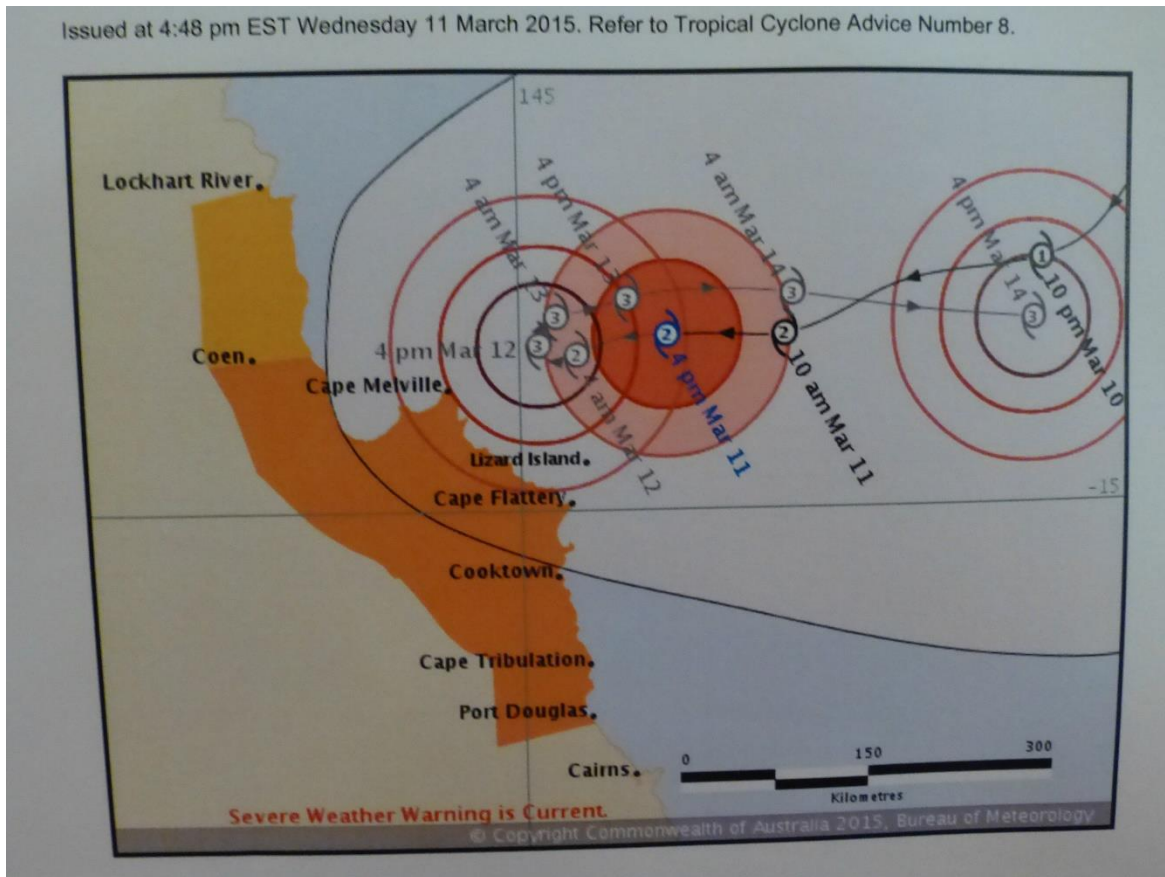
We return to Port Douglas and enjoy an included dinner at our hotel. To help lift our spirits Tour Director Sandra encourages us to dress up in something a little goofy for dinner. Marie comes to dinner as a hippie, Marcia puts on a skit about what a tourist would need to have with her if she crash landed in Australia – a fly hat, portable fan, water, long pants (or as an alternative a jacket worn on the legs – to keep snake fangs from penetrating the skin, camera to document the experience and a few other necessary items. I show my support for the National Champions.



The hotel management advises us that the Port Douglas area is currently under a Cyclone Warning (cyclones are what we call hurricanes in the Northern Hemisphere). A Cyclone Warning is issued when a storm may become a threat within 24 hours.

In reality, as shown by the weather chart posted in the hotel lobby, we are under no direct threat. The storm is fairly far north of us and forecast to approach the coast and then move back out to sea.

Issued at 4:48 pm EST Wednesday 11 March 2015. Refer to Tropical Cyclone Advice Number 8.



Oh well; I am not sure about the others but I am profoundly disappointed to have come half-way around the world and not be able to experience the Great Barrier Reef.

P.S. From Marcia – No fish to see – my Critter Photo Show will be lacking.

## **Australia Tour – Day 18 – Thursday March 12<sup>th</sup> – Port Douglas, Daintree Rainforest & Coopers Creek**

We awake this morning, after our second night at the Pullman Sea Temple Resort in Port Douglas Australia, to a tropical deluge. The Cyclone has now been named. Cyclone Nathan has been upgraded from a Category 1 to a 2 and they forecast it will be a 3 before it skirts the coast north of us and heads back out to sea.

As mentioned yesterday, today's all day trip to the Daintree Rainforest (pictured below in good weather) has been canceled due to the flooding of the Daintree River and inability of the ferry to run. Fellow traveler Nancy quips "How can an excursion to a rain forest be cancelled by rain". Here is what we would have experienced if the trip had not been canceled.





After breakfast we would have departed early on a one+ hour drive to the rainforest. There we would have a guided tour through the rainforest and learned that tens of millions of years ago most all of the Australian continent was rainforest; even the Ayers Rock area that is today semi-desert. As the continent grew more arid, only this area in Queensland remained a rainforest. Hence, this area contains plants, trees, insects and animals that are in many cases millions of years old and found no other place on earth. After our guided walk we would have driven to Cape Tribulation (where Captain Cook ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef in 1790) and boarded a small boat for an hour long nature cruise along the banks of Coopers Creek hopefully spotting saltwater crocodiles. We would have had lunch at the Heritage Lodge on the shore of the river and returned to our hotel about 4 PM.

OK.....back to reality.

We depart our resort at 9:20 AM and drive forty minutes to Mossman Gorge. This is another Aborigine run attraction built and funded by the Australian government. It gives aborigines an opportunity to learn skills in service and tourist industry jobs and an incentive to get an education so that they are eligible for these entry level positions.

Our guide is Rodney. His father was an Irish/Scotsman and his mother an aborigine. He proves to be an excellent guide. He tells us that this rain forest receives nearly thirty feet of rain a year. It seems to us that most has fallen within the last two days!

Rodney takes us through the "smoking ceremony" so that we are "smoked" and cleansed for our journey into sacred land (where, happily, they will allow photos).



Rodney describes the plant and animal life and demonstrates how the aborigines lived in pre-European times. We see a couple of Rain Forest Dragon Lizards.







Our walk continues and we arrive at the river where we admire the rapids and Rodney shows us how the aborigines formulated their paint and how they would decorate their bodies.



The rain really starts to fall now as we walk back to our starting point. There we have tea and snacks. We are bused back to the Visitors Center where we have lunch.

We next drive into town and stop at the Janbal Gallery. This is where we meet the owner and resident artist Brian (Breen) Swindley. Aboriginal art here is quite beautiful and most of the art is composed of small (rain) dots placed on objects to create pictures and tell a story. Sadly no photos are allowed outside or inside of his studio – his artwork is beautiful.

We all sit down at a long table. In front of each of us is a

blank black bomorang, paint, and a narrow stick, like a chopstick, which has a pointed end and a rounded end. Brian shows us how to use the stick and the paint to create dots and drawings.

For the next twenty minutes we each work on creating aboriginal art on our bomorang. We all find this surprisingly relaxing and fun.

We finish. While we let the paint dry on our materpieces Brian plays tunes for us on the old aborigine wind instrument the digeredoo. Brian is deaf. We are amazed at how well he talks (with a Sean Connery accent) and that he can play a musical instrument better than some street performers we have heard along the way.

On the left, from top to bottom, are the paintings by me, Kal, Marcia and Marie.

We drive back to Port Douglas and our Tour Director offers to drop folks off, and pay the admission to, a wildlife park. They could then ride a public shuttle back to the hotel. Marcia is the only one jumping at the opportunity.





Hi All – This is Marcia. On our trip back from Brian's studio, Sandra gave us some options of activities we might want to do before going back to the resort.

One of the options was going through the Wildlife Habitat of Port Douglas. When she said there were animals there, I was hooked, of course. I was the only one who wanted to go. But since she had driven by there to show us, I didn't feel guilty for going. It didn't look like much from the outside, but once I started on the tour I was thrilled. The whole area is fenced and covered with netting. Birds are out walking and flying freely within their habitat section. There were rainforest kangaroo, grassland kangaroo, wetland kangaroo, and even a tree kangaroo.





Birds, from small brightly colored finch size critters all the way up to the Cassowary which is taller than an Emu and has a bright blue neck, parrots, parakeets, swans, ducks, spoonbills, and geese were everywhere. They perched on the fences and posed for pictures. It was great!



In addition, there were wallabies and koala – (even a baby one) that seemed like they were almost within touching distance. It was so great to see them happily munching away on eucalyptus. There was even a chubby crocodile. Do I sound like I enjoyed myself? You bet I did. I think it was one of my favorite stops in Australia!



After we dropped Marcia off the rest of us are driven through some parts of Port Douglas



that we have not previously seen. We drive to a lookout and view Four Mile Beach from above and stop down at the beach. In both cases the Cyclone generated winds are blowing off the Pacific Ocean at maybe thirty miles an hour.



Sandra offers to drop shoppers off in town but there is only one taker as it is again raining hard.

We drive back to our resort and later enjoy an included group dinner (with no dessert ☹).

Tomorrow we fly to the largest city in Australia, Sydney. Hopefully we will be leaving the rain behind.

## **Australia Tour – Day 19 – Friday March 13<sup>th</sup> – Sydney**



This morning we enjoy a leisurely breakfast and check out of the Pullman Sea Temple Resort after a three night stay. This is a most beautiful resort but unfortunately the weather has been terrible during our stay so we have not tried to enjoy their massive swimming pool. Also the weather cancelled our much anticipated excursions to the Great Barrier Reef and to the Daintree Rainforest. The area received five inches of rain just yesterday, giving lie to Queensland's license plate motto "Sunshine State". Cyclone Nathan is still churning off shore and the eye is moving at only two miles per hour. It appears that all ocean and river activities around here may

be suspended for several more days.

We leave our hotel at 9:15 AM drive 40 miles to the Cairns airport. It is raining heavily. We see waterfalls where none are supposed to exist.





Shortly before noon we board a Qantas Boeing 737 for a two-and-a-half hour flight south to Sydney.

As this is going to be a slow travel news day, so I am going to post here a few interesting facts we have learned about Australia's economy and social net.

Australia is a wealthy country with a market economy, a relatively high GDP per capita, and a relatively low rate of poverty. In terms of average wealth, Australia ranked second in the world after Switzerland in 2013. It was identified by the Credit Suisse Research Institute as the nation with the highest median wealth in the world and the second-highest average wealth per adult in 2013. It is ranked third in the index of Economic Freedom and has the world's twelfth largest economy. Not bad for a country of only 24 million people.

Australia has no property tax, no school taxes and no estate taxes. Income taxes are higher than we pay in the USA and they have a 10% General Service Tax on most all purchased goods and services (including food). This tax may soon rise to 14%.

Australia has a "pension" system that seems similar to our Social Security. Many of today's retired folks qualified for a government pension at the age of 60. People retiring ten years from now won't qualify until they are 65 years old. Folks now in their 40s will have to work until they are 70 to qualify. Payment amounts seem roughly equivalent to what we receive in Social Security.

Goods and services in Australia seem to be equal to or more expensive than the USA. Food and drinks are definitely much more expensive. Suggested tips are much lower – 10% at most.

We have heard the comment that "there are no more full time jobs being offered in Australia". When you hear about some of the cost employers must bear you might be able to see a reason for the lack of new full time jobs. The minimum wage mandated by the Federal Government is \$18.60. All weekend work, even if part time, must be paid at the minimum rate of \$27. They have a plan similar to our 401ks that mandates that all employers contribute 9.5% of an employee's salary to a retirement fund. The employee can choose whether he wants to add any of his own earnings to the fund. The employee can withdraw these funds tax free at retirement. All full time employees are guaranteed four weeks paid annual vacation by government mandate. Working for the same company earns a longevity bonus of another two weeks every 10 year anniversary. Law mandates eight sick days with pay per year. Most everyone takes all eight. 18 weeks paid maternity leave (can be shared between husband and wife) are mandated. By law employers must grant all employees a yearly wage increase at least equal to the Consumer Price Index. Australia was the first country to adopt an 8 hour work day and 40 hour work week.



We are told Australians are proud of their balancing of work and leisure and it is rare for a salaried employee to work more than eight hours a day.



Australia has always been proud of their domestic automobile industry. They are proud of "inventing the Ute". They don't have many full size pickups like our Ford F150, but they have a lot of Utes like the Holden (General Motors) pictured on the left. An auto front end with a pickup bed; sort of like a Chevy El Camino from the 1970s.

Last year Toyota and Mitsubitshe closed their assembly plants in Australia. Ford and Holden (General Motors of Australia) have announced they will be closing their engine and assembly plants later this year. This is despite billions of dollars in government subsidies. The manufactures claim non-competitive labor rates as the reason for the closings. This spells the end of one-hundred years of automobile manufacturing in Australia and seems to have rattled the nation's psyche a bit.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has tried to claw back on some of the employment benefits but has had to stop as public opinion is strongly against any changes in this very generous social net.



We land in Sydney at about 4 PM. We have moved our watches ahead one hour as we are now in a different time zone. Sydney is said to be one of the most beautiful and fun cities in the world. It was founded in 1788 by the "First Fleet"....Captain Philips and the convicts....when it was established as a penal colony

Sydney is the capital of the state of New South Wales. New South Wales, at 7.29 million people, is the most populous state in Australia, with 35% of the country's population. Sydney is the most populous city in Australia and all of Oceania with about 4,700,000 residents. It's a very multi-cultural city. An estimated 1.5 million of its residents are said to have been born outside of Australia.

We check into our hotel for the next three nights, the Vibe. The Vibe is located near the center of the city. The rooms are not fancy but are quite large. The day is overcast with a few occasional spits of rain. Temperature is in the low 70s.

At 5:25 PM we meet and Sandra takes us on a walking tour of the historic area around our hotel. We see Sydney's first department store, Mark Foy's, and the ANZAC War Memorial in Hyde Park.





We walk through Hyde Park and see the Archibald Fountain and St. Mary's Catholic Church.



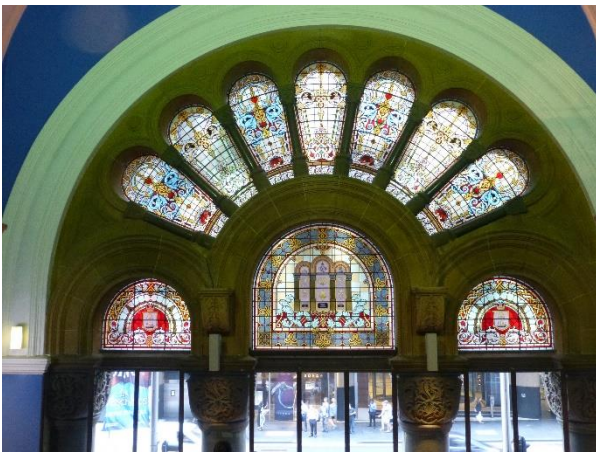
We walk past the restaurant on a tall tower known as the Sydney Eye and down the upscale shopping area on Market Street.



We spend the last part of our walking tour inside the amazing Queen Victoria Building. It was built in 1898 to



celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. It was to be torn down in the 1980s but was saved and is now a most beautiful upscale shopping mall.



We enjoy a great included dinner in the upstairs dining room of a pub right across the street from our hotel.

**Australia Tour – Day 20 – Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup> – Sydney**





We wake up rested after our first of three nights in Sydney, the largest city in Australia. Today we will spend a full day touring Sydney. We board a mini-motor coach at 8 AM. Tour Director Sandra is even more enthusiastic than usual. We think she is really looking forward to showing us Sydney, her hometown and place of residence.

We first drive out to see the two iconic symbols of Sydney. We get a close view of the Harbor Bridge and a more distant view of the Sydney Opera House.



Sandra tells us the bridge was considered a near impossible project when first proposed after World War I. It was started in 1925 and completed in 1928. It employed many out-of-work WWI veterans in its construction. It is the largest single span cantilever bridge in the world and its very top stands 460 feet above the harbor. It was built to carry eight lanes of traffic and railroad trains so is far from obsolete. It is a truly beautiful structure.



We next walk through The Rock District, past the facades of some late nineteenth century buildings, to the location where the first settlers, Captain Phillips, 180 Marines, and 800 convicts (most of them sentenced for petty crimes) first arrived in 1788.

Sandra does a good job in explaining the events, issues and problems surrounding the first landing and settlement. We see the oldest remaining structure, the Cadman Cottage built in 1816 (below) and walk through some other old structures.





We next drive past old government buildings and through the eastern suburbs of Sydney to Bondi Beach. It is nice to finally get to touch the water of the Pacific Ocean (actually the Tasman Sea)! The water is warm. We enjoy walking the beach and seeing surfers, swimmers, and families enjoying a nice Saturday. It is a perfect weather day; sunny and in the mid-70s. It is great for all of us to see the sun after four or five rainy and cloudy days.

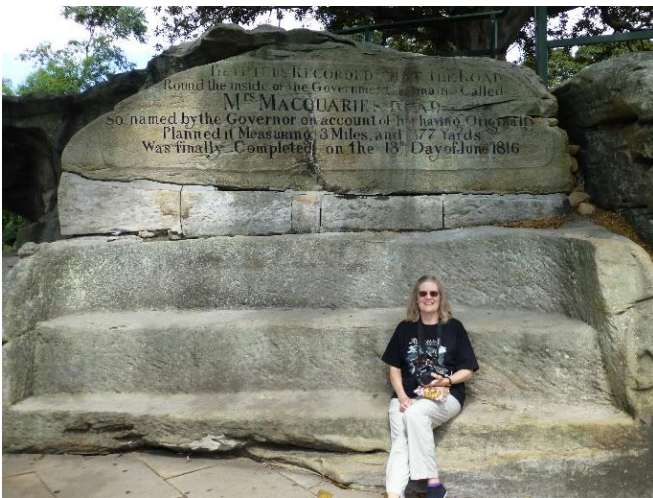




We now drive back towards Sydney Harbor and stop for some photos of the city skyline, the bridge and opera house.



We stop at Mrs. Macquarie's Point and get some nice views. Marcia sits in Mrs. Macquarie's Chair, carved from rock so that the wife of one of Australia's early Governors could comfortably enjoy her favorite view. From here, with our cameras zoomed in, we can see people who have climbed to the top of the Harbor Bridge. Lynn, from our tour group, is going to climb the bridge climb tomorrow!



We have a light lunch at a nice outdoor table. Marie and Kai celebrate the free beer they have received due to their sandwiches being delivered quite late. Marcia shops for some souvenirs.

At 2:20 PM we walk to the docks at Circular Quay and board a large boat for an hour+ cruise around Sydney Harbor, the largest natural harbor in the world. We get more great views of the city, the bridge, the opera house and the new construction on the north shore. There are many sailboats in the harbor on this Saturday.



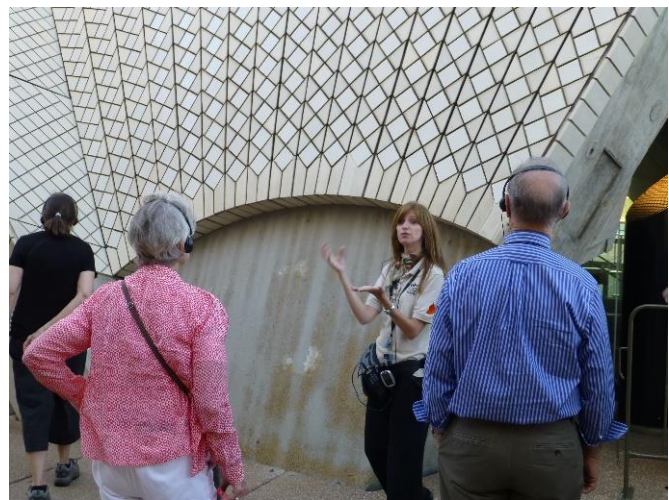






At 4:15 PM we walk to the Sydney Opera House and start a one hour+ guided tour. We learn that this visually spectacular performance facility boasts four auditoriums and hosts symphony concerts, theater and opera.

Conceived in the 1950s and expected to take three years to complete it was finally opened in 1973, sixteen years after the start of construction. 4 million people a year attend performances and 8 million a year tour the facility, as we are now doing. We see a seal on the steps leading to the water.



We learn the interesting details of the conception, design and construction of the Opera House from videos and from our our guide. We see a couple of the venues including the 1500 seat Opera Hall. We are not allowed to take pictures in the halls due to activity on the stages. We do not get to see the 2500 seat main auditorium.



The four of us walk around the quay and enjoy pizzas at an Italian restaurant. Marcia and I walk the three or four miles back to our hotel. Marie and Kal stay in the harbor area to get sunset shots and photos of the city skyline at night and then walk the same route back to our hotel.

## **Australia Tour – Day 21 – Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup> – Sydney**



Today is our last full day in Australia and there are no planned activities until dinnertime. We have the day free to explore Sydney.

Marie and Kal walk to the Botanical Garden and then through several of the nearby parks. Later they do some souvenir shopping at Paddy's Market in the Chinatown neighborhood.



Marcia and I plan to walk to the Sydney Aquarium and see some of the fish species we missed when our trip to The Great Barrier Reef was canceled due to poor weather.

First we admire the old German Lutheran church, built in 1881, that's right across the street from the entrance of our hotel. We enjoy our three mile walk to the aquarium. This morning is overcast and breezy. The streets are busy for a Sunday morning as today is St. Patrick's Day and folks are starting to congregate for the St. Patrick's Day Parade.

We arrive at the Sydney Aquarium at 10 AM and it turns out to be one of the best we've seen. It is built on several levels and has four separate glass "tubes" that you walk through and watch the fish swim all around and above and sometime below you. I was expecting a quiet stroll through the facility on a Sunday morning. We were not planning on the hundreds and hundreds of screaming, crying and stomping preschoolers with their discipline-adverse parents! It is amazingly loud, especially in the more confined areas like the glass tubes.

The first exhibit showcases the Duck Billed Platypus and then the fresh water fishes of Australia. Then it's on to the turtles and the Little Penguins of Tasmania and the southern coast of Australia.

We enter the first of the glass tubes and start viewing the salt water fish.



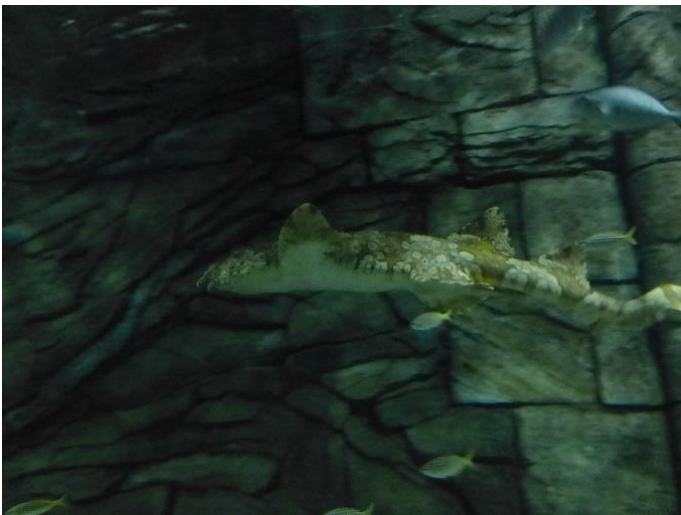


We see the Australian Manatee and many sharks.





We see Rays, a Sawfish, an Ornate Wobbegong Shark and Jellyfish.



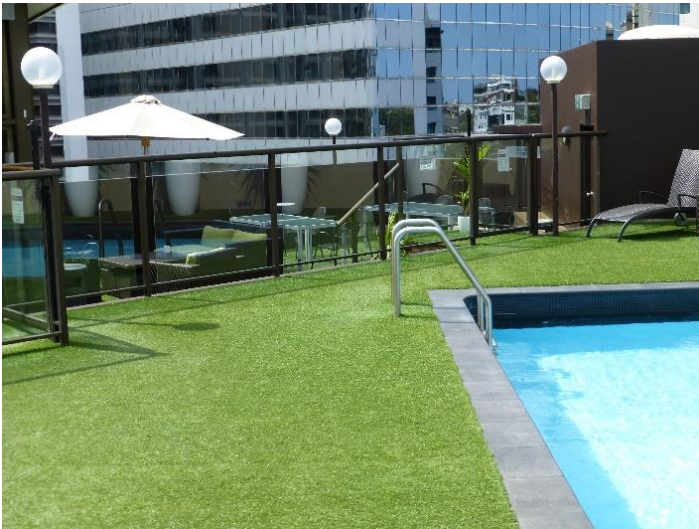
Then we reach the Great Barrier Reef.



# GREAT BARRIER REEF







We leave the aquarium a little after noon and walk to Paddy's Market in Chinatown for some souviner shopping. Marcia and I return to the hotel and relax around the pool on the roof. Later I watch the Australain Formula One Grand Prix from Melbourne.

We all meet at 5:30 PM and are driven to a local restaurant for our Farewell Dinner. Lynn shows us pictures of her ascent of the Harbor Bridge.





## Australia Tour – Day 22 – Monday March 16<sup>th</sup> – Return to the USA

Today we end our tour of Australia and return to the United States.

We leave our hotel at 7 AM and are driven to Sydney's International Airport. We board a massive Qantas double-deck Airbus A380 and take off on time at 10:50 AM.

The economy section is mostly full. All four of us have secured aisle seats. We are delighted to discover that in all cases we have no one in the seat adjacent to us. We should be fairly comfortable.

Our flight from Sydney to Los Angeles is "only" fourteen hours vs. the sixteen hour flight from LA to Melbourne on our way to Australia.

We are crossing the International Dateline, so we will be landing in LA about 6:30 AM, about seven hours "before we left" Australia.

We land on time and then have to clear the long lines at Passport Control, reclaim our checked bags, clear the long lines at customs, and recheck our bags and clear the long lines at security.



Marcia and I have four hours to catch our connecting flight so we have plenty of time to relax in the mess that is LAX...what a dump! I must have tried fifty electrical outlets until I found one that worked. What is up with that?

We have a direct USAirways flight that departs LAX at 10:40 AM PDT and lands in Pittsburgh at 7:20 EDT. Jaime picks us up. At our home Pepper is happy to see Marcia.

Marie and Kal have only been given two hours to connect to their flights home by OAT. They don't make it; they are at the United Airlines counter (to recheck their bags) half an hour before their connecting flight, but there is not enough time to clear security again and catch the flight. They are rebooked on a flight departing LAX at 11:30 PM!!! They get a hotel room and shower and try to sleep. They end up flying all night to Chicago, then down to Dayton, arriving home at 11:30 AM on Tuesday!

We are still all trying to adjust to the time zone changes. It was a good trip. Missing out on the Great Barrier Reef experience keeps this from being a great trip.

Our tour company OAT (Overseas Adventure Travels) contacts us to advise that they are rebating us \$300 per person for the missed excursions to the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree Rainforest and are issuing us a \$250 per person voucher for future travel with them. This seems most fair. Unfortunately, I don't see how we will ever be able to get back to the "other side of the world" and experience the Great Barrier Reef.

Here are Marcia's souvenirs.



