

Australia Trip 2006

Mike and I have just returned from our Australia Trip 2006 and we had a great time. Australia was quite easy to travel through by air, bus, car & boat. The people spoke English, a little bit of native language slang used but we could figure out what they meant. The money exchange was easy to figure out...you need lots of money!

It was nice traveling by ourselves at times and joining a pre-arranged tour at other times. The flight to Australia did not seem too stressful. Our first stop was Sidney to get over jet lag and day one we went to view the city from the Sydney tower for a 360 degree view. We then went for a day harbor cruise and then to the Sydney Aquarium, nice close encounters with the shark tanks and Mike and I loved to watch the platypuses.

The next day we signed up for the Harbor Bridge Climb. The bridge completed in 1932, is 1,150m (3,772 ft.) long and spans 503m (1,650 ft.) from the south shore to the north. It accommodates pedestrian walkways, two railway lines, and an eight-lane road. We were suited up for the climb and given instructions and an insight on how to climb the bridge. It was a bit cool and windy the day we did the climb but we had a fleece jacket provided. We had everything attached to our suits from a raincoat, fleece jacket, hanky etc. We were not allowed to take our cameras, jewelry, or watches on the climb, anything that could fall off us onto the traffic below. Of course the bridge climbing company had several stops planned for us on our ascend and descend to take our photos that we would purchase and pay them a good price for when we were done. We liked the photos and knew we would never do this again so we purchased them on a CD disk as our souvenir. After the climb we went to an outdoor craft show, nice lunch overlooking the opera house and a night harbor cruise. That night from our room I heard what sounded like fireworks in the harbor. Our room overlooked the Sidney opera house and sure enough fireworks were being shot off in the harbor in front of the opera house. We thought it is not a holiday here but maybe it was for the wedding party we saw at the opera house when we were walking around it earlier.

We picked up our rental car and was off to the Blue Mountains. We stayed at the Old Leura Dairy, once a milk dairy turned into a retreat. Mike and I had a nice room but it was too cold to try the outdoor hot tub that used to be a milk vat used at the once dairy. On the day we left this place I decided to take a look at the milk vat hot tub and when leaving the deck my sandal got stuck on the wooden steps and down I flew!! I landed on my left knee and smashed my hand on the stucco wall. I called out to Mike and he got me back to our room. I was lucky I did not break my leg! I banged it up and my hand but was not hurt bad. Anyway before this happened Mike and I hiked all over the Blue Mountain region, went on an incline railway and cable car down to the bottom of a steep valley that they used to get coal from. We also went for a train ridge called the Zigzag railway that used to get coal from the mines. The Blue Mountains reminded me of the Smokey Mountains in TN and the canyons were similar to our Grand Canyons. The Blue Mountain area is a tourist area with lots of shops and restaurants. In the area we saw the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, Lyrebird, Rainbow Lorikeets and the Crimson Rosella to name a few. After 4 days here we left to drive back to Sidney.

We stopped off at a nice wild life park before returning the car. The kangaroos hop around with the tourist and you can feed them and pet them...they have a roped off area in case they get sick of the tourist and you are not suppose to go in their area. You can also pet lots of other animals and get your photo with one of many Kolas that were in the park. My favorite animals were the Tasmania Devil and the Wombat. We wanted to see the animals that we were hoping to see in the wild which many of them we did.

Our next stop was Palm Cove in Cairns. We had an early morning boat cruise and snorkel trip the next day. It was a beautiful day and the boat went out 40 miles to an island where the reef was that our outfit had reserved for us to snorkel in. The reef was amazing, the water was clear and the reef was very much alive with many different coral and anemones with beautiful colors and many tropical fish. Mike and I swam together and Mike spotted a very large Manta Ray swimming under us. The boat called us to come in for lunch. After lunch Mike went back out snorkeling I went to explore the island's beach and birds.

The next day was our Kuranda tour by scenic railway through the rainforest. At the top were many shops and cafes. Then we took the cable car down to the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Centre. An aboriginal girl told us about the preparation of local fruits and plants used for food and medicine. The aboriginal men showed how to play the didgeridoo, throw a spear and the correct way to throw a boomerang. Mike purchased a didgeridoo and I hope he learns how to play that instrument otherwise it sounds terrible.

The next day a local guide picked us up at our hotel to take us to the Daintree River cruise and to Cape Tribulation for a stroll through the rainforest to the shores of the Coral Sea. Cape Tribulation is a dense rainforest with plants dating back thousands of years. It is the home of the Southern Cassowary a very unusual bird which is classified as an endangered species. We did not see this bird in the wild but we did see a male, female and their chicks in a wildlife park. It was interesting to observe that the chicks were attended to by the male not the female.

Caught a plane to Darwin the next day for our 5 day tour with Australian Pacific Tours. Every morning a trip was planned for us and off we went. The highlight was a six passenger plane that we went on. There was only Mike, myself and one other person and the pilot in this plane. The pilot flew us over a pristine area that had very unusual rock formations, dry waterfalls and flowing rivers. When the rainy season starts the dry water beds will be overflowing...but Australia is suffering from drought conditions lately. If you wanted to buy bananas in the market they cost up to \$15.00 a pound!

We then went on a river cruise that showed us lots of water birds and large crocodiles. It was very hot some days as high as 105 degrees. One day our tour consisted of three waterfall stops. We didn't quite get the information that we could swim in all of them so we missed being suited for the first waterfall but jumped in the pools and swam under the waterfalls on the next two stops.

We were then off to Alice Springs for the night and the next day we rented a car and off to the Red Center and Ayers Rock. Mike did all the driving and he really liked the auto ban where there is no speed limit and he made sure he tried it out!!! He drove about 4 ½ hours through the outback and we stopped at the rest areas and cafes on the way. Ayers Rock was an amazing hunk of rock...this area did remind me of Oklahoma with all the red dirt!!! We did some hiking at Ayers Rock but climbing it was closed off due to high winds. I wouldn't of climbed it to save my life anyways in the heat and the steep climb.

That night was our Sounds of Silence Dinner...but after the beer and champagne some people couldn't be quite to hear absolute silence and started giggling. The dinner was staged in a reserved area out in the desert located between Ayer Rock and the Olgas. We were taken to the spot just before sunset and given glasses of champagne or beer and snacks. When sunset was over we were led to tables all decked out for dinner. A buffet was served and then a lone didgeridoo echoed across the desert. Mike was disappointed because it was a full moon and the moon was so bright you could not see all the stars he wanted to view. A resident astronomer had two scopes set up and gave an impressive interpretation of the night sky. Mike asked the astronomer to find stars and planets for him and he did find several interesting ones for him. Mike got so involved he missed dessert but he had some of mine.

Mike and I went to hike in areas by Ayer Rock and then the Olgas. Just stunning views everywhere but it got quite hot between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. so we had to get up early if we wanted to hike in these areas. Some pretty rough hiking too! Some of the paths were just rocks leading through the canyons. We left this area and drove to Kings Canyon and the next day got up early to hike the Kings Canyon Rim walk. It took 3 ½ hours to finish the hike but was worth every minute. The path led us through the canyon and way down into the bottom of the canyon called the Garden of Eden where water holes were formed in the rock beds and many palms and plants grew there and the sound of the frogs were everywhere but you just couldn't see them!

We left this area the next day and continued to drive back to Alice Springs for the night and flight out the next day to Kangaroo Island. On our trip back we saw several dingos and a wild camel in the outback desert. We also stopped to photograph a goanna lizard and another monitor lizard we were not quite sure of the species.

Kangaroo Island was our finally destination of our trip for a five-night stay at the Wanderer's Rest Bed and Breakfast. It was a nice place situated up high on a hill facing a large lagoon where black swans and water birds gathered. It was in this area that we saw wallabies come to munch the owners of the Wanderer's Rest garden. They didn't like it so much but we got a kick out of seeing the wallabies and the baby wallabies munch on the plants. We also found the short-beaked echidna on one of our hikes in this area called American River. It was called American River because some Americans built a boat in the area for hunting seals. The Short-beaked Echidna is a very strange animal and is along with the Platypus are the only members of the monotreme family which are Mammals that lay eggs and produces milk for its young.

We finally found a good spot to watch the kangaroos. They hide during the day under the thick bush and you rarely see them but at dusk they come out to graze and eat everything in sight. You have to be real careful driving when it starts getting dark as the animals can end up on the road you are traveling and the kangaroos and wallabies can cause serious damage to your car which you are held responsible for the damages. After a few tours the first two days Mike felt he was ready to drive at night in our rental car.

Our first tour was scheduled at night on our stay on Kangaroo Island to go and see the Little Blue Penguins also called Fairy Penguins. The penguins come to shore with food for the baby penguins. The Little Blue Penguin adults are out all day fishing, feeding themselves and then filling up their stomachs to regurgitate the contents in their stomachs to the babies in their flock. The parents must know who their kids are because they refuse to feed other babies that approach them for food. They make their nest in either burrows or rock crevices and take a running path towards their nest to feed their babies. During this time the penguin are very noisy and the babies are pestering the adults to be fed and even after they are fed they pester them till they run away from them. Sorta sounds like human babies doesn't it! It was a nice experience to see the penguins... After that the driver took us to spotlight the Western Grey Kangaroos, Tammar Wallabies and Brush-tailed Possums. Australia has many different species of kangaroos and we only saw a few different kinds.

The next day we were picked up for a all day tour to some cliffs of Kangaroo Island to see the seals at Seal Bay, walk on the beach and then to see the Cape du Couedic Lighthouse. We then went to see some pretty unusual rock formations created when a granite dome was exposed to fracturing and weathering over 200 million years ago. We had one couple with us on this tour from Canada. They were on Kangaroo Island for only one day coming over from the main land by ferry and returning by plane so our guide had a full day of driving getting us to the main points of interest before he had to get them back to the airport. We were a little late getting back to the airport so he was really pushing the pedal to get the couple back and we barely made the shuttle for them. It was a very pleasant day and the guide made us a BBQ lunch at a nice park shelter including steak, potatoes, onions, salad, wine ect....one of our better tour lunches.

The next few days Mike and I were on our own so we went to two other lighthouses, Cape Borda and Cape Willoughby. Both located on opposite ends of the island. At Cape Borda the lighthouse cannon was to be fired off at 12:30 a.m. Mike and I went on the lighthouse tour and I was picked to fire the cannon. The group for the tour moved away from the cannon and I had to wear an ear protection headset and with firing mechanism in hand was to have a countdown by the lighthouse tour guide when to push the button to fire the cannon. Between having a hard time sometimes understanding the Australian dialect and having the ear protection headset on I thought the guide said ready, aim, fire so I pushed the button and the cannon went off and I smiled thinking a did a great job of it. When I took off my headset Mike said I didn't get a picture of you firing the cannon. I said why not and he said because the guide was gonna do a countdown starting with 5 to zero and you fired the cannon when he said 5 and surprised everyone!!! Ha! I said I thought he said to fire the cannon so I did. We laughed for days about it!

We continued to hike the areas on the island and found the Kolas, Kangaroos, birds, lizards and wineries on our own at our own pace. We had a nice lunch at a seaside bar and made it to a pelican feeding one afternoon where hundreds of pelicans came to munch on free fish dished out by a sailor from a big bucket, quite funny to watch them wait for the fish and for the grand finale the sailor threw the rest of the fish in the water and the pelicans dove for the fish.

It was back to the airport to fly back to Adelaide for the night. No time for dinner in Adelaide that night but we did eat at a fantastic restaurant in Adelaide the first time we were there before Kangaroo Island. It was an Argentina restaurant and the food was great! I loved watching the busy kitchen and the steaks and seafood being served in the restaurant. It was quite busy that night as it was the night of the Melbourne Cup. The Australians were dumb founded that a horse from Japan won the race. On this day people all over Australia get dressed to the hilt for the race. Women worn large featured hats and little of nothing dresses.

We left Adelaide early the next morning to fly to Sidney and then from Sidney to Los Angeles and then home.....I can say the trip home for 30 some hours seemed a lot longer than flying to Australia but I did pick up a sinus and chest infection on the plane to Kangaroo Island that got worst before I got home. I did get some meds from my doctor and I feel OK now that my jet lag is gone and my head has stopped pounding.

I would recommend a vacation to Australia to anyone, it was a relaxing trip, hectic at times but over all a great trip. One I know Mike and I will remember for years to come.

Audrey & Mike