



travel tales

By: Susan Kehoe, PhD

Fabulous Fiji.

Koalas and Crocs and Palm Trees, Oh My!

When I boarded the first tour bus in Cairns, Australia, the guide said, "Nine of the ten deadliest things in the world are found in Australia." I began to reconsider my bucket list. The same thing happened in Fiji when the guide began his introduction with, "Don't worry, we don't practice cannibalism on this island -- anymore." Maybe that's why they call Fiji an "exotic" island...?

However, our trip to Cairns and Sydney, Australia, and a beautiful resort in Fiji was one of our most memorable. "Down Under" the equator the weather is opposite what we're experiencing in the northern hemisphere. In other words, when the thermometer reads -10 below zero in Bloomfield Hills in February, you experience 90 degrees with camera-lens-fogging humidity on the other side of the Equator.

Michael and I began the adventure in Cairns, Queensland, gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. It's the world's single largest structure made by living organisms; CNN labeled it one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. We viewed the varieties of coral, shells and fish through glass-bottom boats, although many chose to snorkel. We traversed a tropical rainforest and also observed several indigenous animal species: ferocious crocodiles slithered through rivers, koalas awoke to be petted, and wallabies (small kangaroos) hopped across the highways like squirrels and deer back home.



Susan and Michael at Sydney Harbor.

At Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, the Aboriginal Australians, comprising 3% of the population, dressed in authentic costumes to share their customs, dances and rituals. There was a bit of boomerang and spear frolicking for the men; one young man sent a spear into the center of the target on his first try -- outshining the amazed instructor. Michael's strength was definitely stepping out of the way of returning boomerangs. He exclaimed, "It's one thing to make those things sail, but it's another thing when they come flying back at you at top speed!"



Crocodiles everywhere.

Sydney, New South Wales, was the highlight of the trip and our main reason for visiting Australia. The iconic opera house on Sydney Harbor is a must-see feat of architecture, inside and out. In the Concert Hall, we heard the stunning reverberation of "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony" played by a small orchestra.

Our tour included a history of the opera house from 1946 when Sydney orchestra conductor, Eugene Goossens, first introduced the idea, to its completion in 1973. Jorn Utzon, a Danish architect, won the design competition with a free-form rendition inspired by sails on the harbor. It was initially discarded

as too radical until Saarinen, familiar to us from the Cranbrook connection, came late to the judging and insisted on reviewing all the designs. The original cost projection when construction began in 1957 was \$7 million, but concluded in 1973 at \$102 million. Nonetheless, it is identified as one of the 20th century's

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Exploring the rainforests of Cairns, Australia.



Petting Koalas.

most distinctive buildings and one of the most famous performing arts centers in the world; its vision and magnitude left me speechless.

On the other side of Sydney Harbor is Darling Harbor, which I nicknamed the "Fun Harbor". Home to the largest

IMAX theatre in the world, it has every manner of restaurant and activity, including the Sea Life Sydney Aquarium and Australian Naval Museum. Our hotel on the harbor was adjacent to China Town where we experienced the full impact of a true Chinese New Year celebration. The entrance to Darling Harbor was decorated for the occasion and in the evening a parade wove its way through the streets beneath our hotel. Furling dragons dancing on poles born by parade bearers led the way to proclaim the Year of the Sheep. Fireworks were bursting from rooftops around the harbor and it was an unexpected trip highlight. More than eight percent of the population of Australia is Asian, predominantly Chinese.

Sydney is a very walkable city. We trekked between the two harbors daily, visiting the Botanical Gardens and Hyde Park as we walked to the Opera House. Another stop was the Art Gallery



Chinese New Year on Darling Harbor in Sydney.

of New South Wales, which features a striking Picasso painting along with some masters and many fine Australian painters. One of my funniest memories is the misspelling of "Michelangelo" as "Michael Angelo" carved with other famous artists' names on the outside of the museum.

During our walks we visited beautiful buildings converted into shopping areas that still maintain the original nineteenth century aesthetic. The Queen Victoria building with elaborate Romanesque architecture was my favorite. Decorative railings, stain glass windows, vaulted ceilings and plaster arches adorned the area. Affectionately known as the QVB, architect George McRae completed it in 1898 to replace the original Sydney markets.

The tropical paradise of Fiji in the South Pacific is a place to savor. Free-range lizards and tiny frogs wanting to be adopted greeted us in the evenings. We stayed in a large, ocean-view room with its own private beach-- enchanting. Friendly Fijians greet you with "Bula!", a word that covers most conversation. The men wear skirts as their business uniform (khakis and shirts on the bus to work) and different prints designate job significance. Women dress in long breezy muumuu-style garments to deal with the hot, humid weather.

On our way home we had an 11-hour layover in Los Angeles. So we did the reasonable thing and rented a car with another couple to drive up the coast of Santa Monica and Malibu. Michael remembered a wonderful restaurant where we indulged in a dinner of giant prawns as the waves of the ocean rolled in beneath the sunset.

If this trip is on your bucket list, a word of advice: when booking, break up the 22-hour flight with a stop over for one or two days in either Hawaii or Los Angeles. It makes the flight more palatable, relieves the jet lag, and extends your time in another lovely vacation spot. The experience and memories of this vacation are worth the lengthy trip.

Traveled someplace interesting? Have your vacation featured in this neighborhood publication. We are looking for anyone who has a good travel story and photos to share! For more information please email Susan Kehoe at: svkehoe.n2pub@gmail.com



Aboriginal Australian creating a fire.