

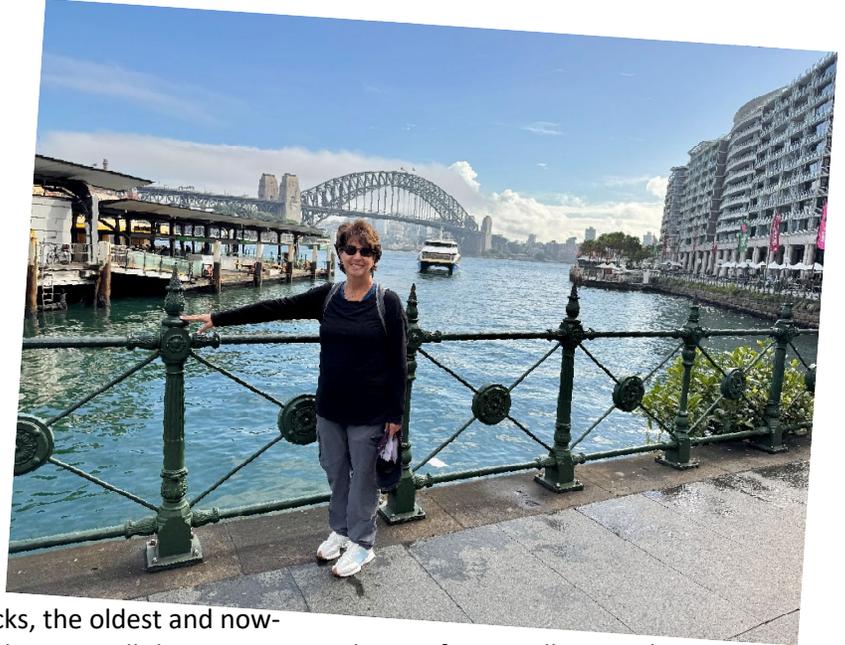
## Australia Travel Journal – Volume 1

Thursday, April 24, 2025 - Sydney Australia

G'day from Down Under. Lori and I arrived this morning in Sydney after a 15-hour flight that left Los Angeles Tuesday night, crossed the international date line, and completely skipped Wednesday.

Even though we're on the bottom of the planet, I can barely tell I'm upside down. Maybe that's because the earth is flat after all? Nevertheless, the moon does appear upside down, so I'm trying to reconcile those two observations. I have a call into Neil deGrasse Tyson for an explanation.

Sydney, capital of New South Wales and one of Australia's largest cities, was first settled by Europeans in 1788 as a British penal colony, as the British couldn't send their criminals to America any longer. The convicts served their sentences and eventually made Sydney the fifth most expensive city in the world, after Singapore, Paris, Oslo, and Zurich.



In the afternoon we did a walking tour of The Rocks, the oldest and now-fashionable part of Sydney that started off as the home to all the convicts sent here. After a walk around Circular Quay to admire the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge, we went back to the hotel, skipped dinner, and were asleep for the night by 4pm. That's what happens when you skip Wednesday.

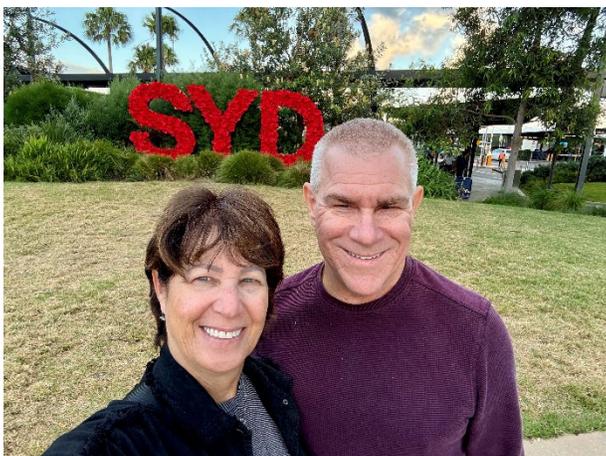


Friday, April 25, 2025 - Sydney

We started the day with a nice breakfast in the hotel. I asked one of the servers if he speaks my language; he just smiled and gave me a vegemite sandwich. If that doesn't mean anything to you, you're either too old or too young. Google it. That was the first time and probably the last time I'll be eating vegemite.

After breakfast we headed to the harbourfront (notice the Australian spelling) for a guided tour of the Sydney Opera House with its distinctive sail-like design. The Opera House is a great example of how not to do things. Though it's one of the most recognized and iconic buildings in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site, the

building process was a disaster. Not only did the costs go up from an estimated \$7 million to \$102 million (talk about blowing your budget!), it took 14 years and more than 10,000 construction workers to get the job done. Did anyone say "government project?"



After a walk around the Royal Botanic Gardens, we took a ferry to Manly Beach, so named by the British because the native men living there were, well, manly. If they discovered the area today, they probably would have named it something else. Since today is Anzac Day, a national day to remember and honor Australians and New Zealanders who fought in wars and conflicts around the world, a lot of businesses and schools are closed, and this beach town was packed. We had lunch at a beachside restaurant and walked around, then headed back to Sydney via the ferry.

We've been here almost two days and still we haven't seen any kangaroos yet.

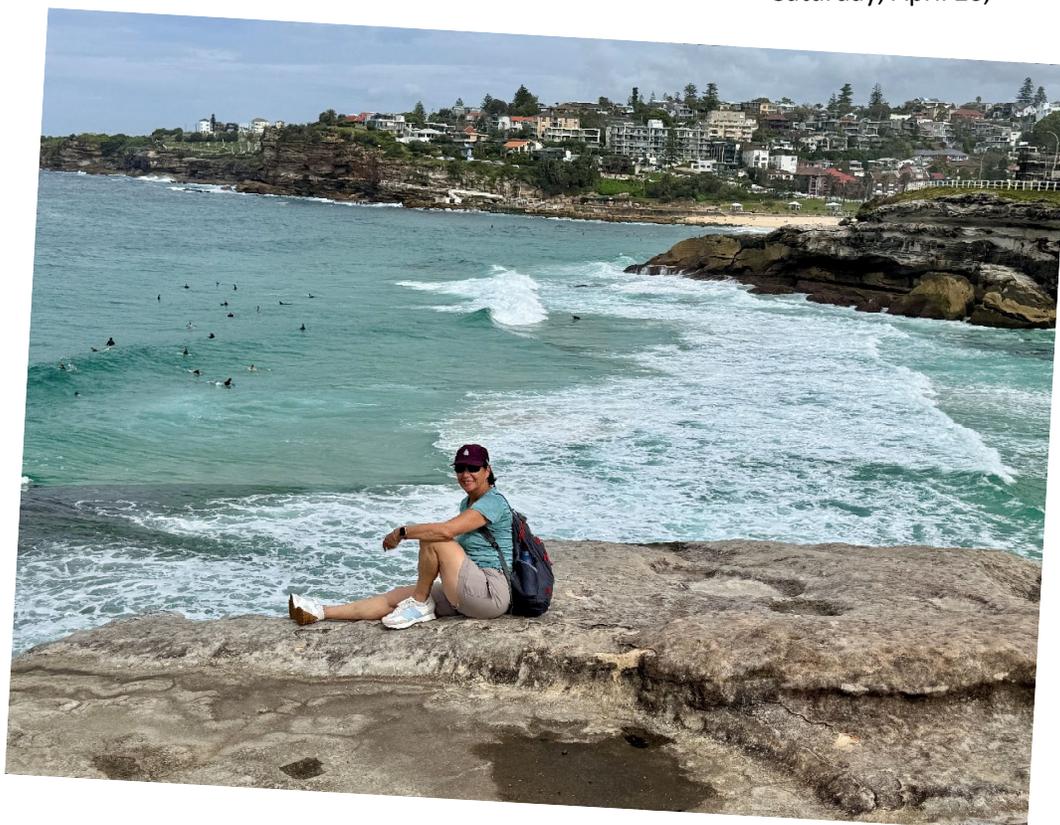
Saturday, April 26,

2025 - Sydney

After breakfast we Ubered to Coogee and walked the famous four-mile Bondi to Coogee Coastal Walk. This scenic walk offers amazing views of cliffs, beaches, and coves. We ended in Bondi, one of the most famous stretches of sand in the world. After lunch in Bondi, we headed back to Sydney and ascended the Sydney Sky Tower with every other tourist in town for 360-degree views of the city and suburbs.

Still no kangaroos.

Love Lori and Stephen



## Australia Travel Journal – Volume 2

Sunday, April 27, 2025 - Sydney

Today we escaped the city and headed for the nearby Blue Mountains, hoping to see some of Australia's famous natural beauty. In Katoomba, we rode the Scenic Cableway, which soars nine hundred feet above the valley floor. Unfortunately, it was so cloudy we couldn't see five feet below us, much less nine hundred. We might as well have stayed on the bus with a fog machine turned on. Next, we rode the world's steepest railway, descending at a 52-degree angle into the rainforest. Once at the bottom, we took a soggy but lush walk through the rainforest. We saw trees and a waterfall up close, with the emphasis on "up close," because anything more than ten feet away was completely obscured by the clouds. Later, we watched YouTube videos of what we should have seen. It was incredible; I highly recommend it.



After lunch the weather cleared up, and we headed to Featherdale Wildlife Park where we finally saw kangaroos, albeit not in the wild, along with wallabies, koalas, wombats, dingoes, emus, penguins, and just about every other animal that could be used in an Australian tourism brochure.

Monday, April 28, 2025 - Melbourne

We bid farewell to Sydney this morning and rushed to the airport for our flight to Melbourne, only to have the flight cancelled on us after we checked in. Qantas rebooked us on a later flight and with a little scrambling and rushing around, we made it to Melbourne and to our afternoon food tour on time. We started the tour by paying homage to the indigenous people that originally inhabited Australia, which we've dutifully done at the start of every tour so far. It's Australia's way of coming to grips with the native population that they fucked over (e.g., slaughtering, sterilizing, kidnapping, and taking their lands). It seems to work in Australia, along with acceptance of drunk driving checkpoints frequently encountered which dramatically affect people's decision to not drink and drive and therefore saves lives. It would never work in the US, where we'd be infringing on

people's "civil liberties."

On the tour we sampled a variety of delicious dishes from the many ethnic groups that now call Melbourne home and met some fellow travelers who enjoy eating their way through a new city as much as we do.

Melbourne (pronounced "Melbin" in Australian) is the capital and most populous city in the Australian state of Victoria and the second largest city in Australia, after Sydney. It also holds the less enviable distinction of having spent the most cumulative days in lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. That must have seriously tested the locals' obsession with coffee, evidenced by the sheer number of coffee shops here. In fact, McCafés (with baristas) were born in Melbourne,

after a McDonald's franchise owner noticed customers bringing their own coffee to breakfast. They'll tolerate McDonald's shitty food but draw the line at coffee. Priorities!

As if we hadn't eaten enough on the food tour, we then headed to Chinatown for dinner, home to the longest continuous Chinese settlement in the Western world. At this rate, they'll be ancient Australians by the year 52,000 AD and we'll also have to pay our respects to them before a tour.



Tuesday, April 29, 2025 - Melbourne

After breakfast we dropped off our laundry at a nearby laundromat. Modern technology has officially reached the neighborhood laundromat. We stuffed our dirty clothes into a locker, secured it with a password, and texted our contact info to some unseen laundry mogul. A few hours later, I received a text with a payment link, and once I paid, we were instructed to retrieve our clean, folded clothes from a different locker, again with our password. The entire process was efficient and completely devoid of in-person contact.

Later in the morning, we joined a Melbourne Walking Tour on which we hit all the historical and cultural highlights in the city's centre (Australian



spelling, of course). From

there, we made our way to the Queen Victoria Market, billed as the largest open-air market in the Southern Hemisphere. That sounds impressive, until you remember that only about 10% of the world's population lives in the Southern Hemisphere.



Wednesday, April 30, 2025 - Melbourne

We headed out of Melbourne early this morning for a full-day tour of the Great Ocean Road. This scenic drive along the rugged ocean coast took us past spectacular limestone formations, gorges, beaches, bays, and rainforests. This is Australia's most-visited area, getting more tourists than the Great Barrier Reef, and it was spectacular. We even saw kangaroos and koalas, this time in the wild.

To be continued...  
Love Lori and Stephen



## Australia Travel Journal – Volume 3

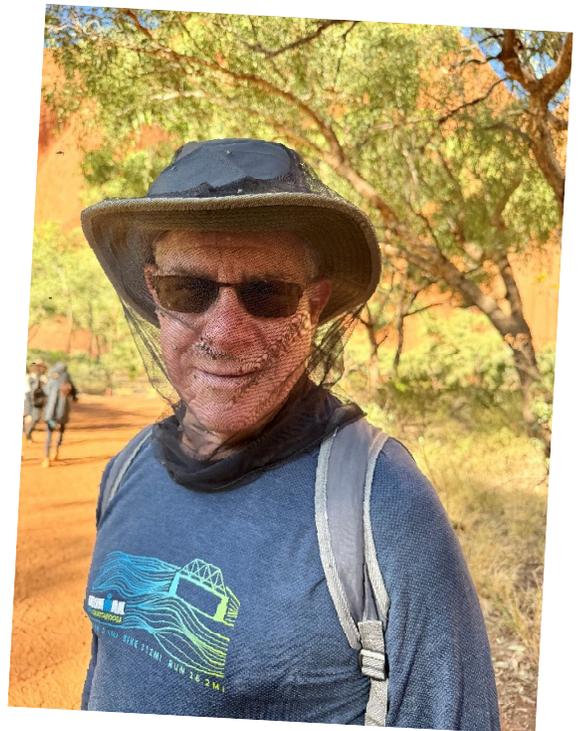
Thursday, May 1, 2025 - Uluru



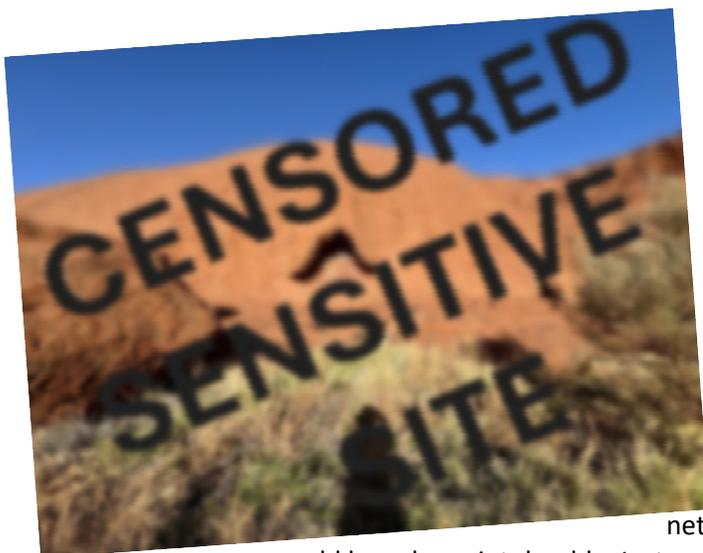
We departed Melbourne this morning for the outback, flying to the heart of Australia's Northern Territory to Uluru, the massive sandstone monolith sacred to the Anangu people. It's taller than the Eiffel Tower and is thought to have started forming a mere 550 million years ago, give or take a few millennia. Uluru's striking red form dominates Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Once known as Ayers Rock-Mount Olga National Park, the renaming in 1993, before woke was a thing, honored Aboriginal ownership and cultural heritage. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, Uluru is a symbol of Australian identity and a magnet for tourists who like their rocks big, red, and really old.

The time zone here is half an hour earlier than the east coast of Australia and therefore offset from the rest of the world by 30 minutes, presumably to ensure everyone remains slightly confused. We're staying at a resort called *Sails in the Desert*, but it could be more appropriately named *Flies in the Desert*. Not to denigrate our hotel, it's peak fly season right now where we are in the desert. During the day we were annoyed by so many flies we had to invest in head nets, so now we're walking around looking like beekeepers.

We had dinner tonight in the desert under the stars, overlooking giant rock formations. Thankfully, the flies go away after dark. After dinner, which included kangaroo meat, which doesn't taste like chicken, a guide pointed out the constellations, planets, and stars visible from our campsite. It turns out the night sky is a lot more impressive when you're far from city lights (and swarming flies).



Friday,  
May 2,  
2025 -  
Uluru



Today we got up close and personal with Uluru, walking around its base to learn about its cultural significance, then watching the famous Uluru sunset. The rock is massive, and there's no way to appreciate its size from photos. Additionally, some of the areas of the rock, usually the most interesting, are so culturally sensitive to the Anangu people that photos are not allowed.

Our best purchase of the trip so far turned out to be the fly nets we bought yesterday. Without the nets the excursion would have been intolerable. Instead, it was just barely tolerable.

Saturday, May 3, 2025 - Uluru

Another day, another huge rock. Today we headed to Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), another rock formation in the area. We hiked through the Walpa Gorge for stunning views and a geology lesson of how the site was formed. On the drive back to the resort we came across a large herd of wild camels. Australia has the largest population of wild camels in the world. They were brought here in the mid-1800's to help explore and develop the arid interior of the continent. Horses and oxen struggled in the harsh outback, but camels, native to desert environments, thrived. As motor vehicles became more common in the early 20th century, camels were no longer needed for transport. Many were simply released into the wild, and they multiplied. It is estimated that there are now over one million camels roaming freely in the outback.



In the evening, we attended the Field of Light, an art installation which lights up the desert night with 50,000 lights that we walked through. It is the size of seven football fields, but I'm not sure if that is American football or soccer. It was very cool, and no flies!

Stay tuned for more. We leave Uluru tomorrow and have one more stop before leaving Australia. Love Lori and Stephen



## Australia Travel Journal – Volume 4

Sunday, May 4, 2025 – Port Douglas

With our fill of rock formations and flies, we flew this morning from Uluru to Cairns (pronounced “Cans”; “r” is silent in the middle of the word in an Aussie accent), then drove to Port Douglas, a charming beach town on the Coral Sea in the tropical far north of Queensland. It's known for its beach resorts and as a base for visits to both the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree National Park, both of which we plan to visit.

It was pissing down rain (an Aussie expression) when we arrived in Port Douglas. After settling into our hotel on the beach, we walked into the main shopping and dining section of the town and found a spot for dinner. I ordered Moreson Bay Bugs, which doesn't sound appetizing but were delicious. They're a small lobster-like shellfish with a tail about the size of a jumbo shrimp. Bad name, good food.

Monday, May 5, 2025 – Port Douglas

Today is the day we planned to go to The Great Barrier Reef, the largest coral reef system in the world. Stretching over 1,400 miles along the coast of Queensland, it's home to thousands of species of marine life, including colorful fish, sea turtles, sharks, and corals in every shape and hue. It's one of the seven natural wonders of the world, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and on every diver's bucket list.



When we woke up, the wind was blowing hard, and we could see large waves on the beach. After having serious second thoughts, but learning that those conditions will likely continue all week, past our planned departure day, we decided to go ahead with our diving and snorkeling plans anyway. We got picked up and were told (warned?) by the driver of a marine advisory with winds blowing at 20 knots. Heard and acknowledged. We signed in at the dock and were told (warned?) again about the conditions. Yep. We got on the boat, informed again. You know how this goes. Nevertheless, we went for it. The hour and a half ride to the reef was ROUGH, but we held it together (barely). I did three scuba dives while Lori snorkeled. We skipped the lunch



buffet onboard the boat. The ride back to the marina was just as bad as the trip out. However, in hindsight it was all worth it. The underwater scenery was beautiful. We saw huge coral formations, lots of fish and other sea life, and sea turtles. Another item checked off our bucket list! Now I'm just waiting for the ground to stop rocking.

Tuesday, May 6, 2025 – Port Douglas

The Daintree Rainforest is over 135 million years old, making it the oldest rainforest in the world. It contains an almost complete record of the evolution of plant life on Earth and has more ancient families of flowering plants than anywhere else in the world. So, we gotta go!



Our full day tour started with our tour guide/driver getting pulled over for a speeding ticket not five minutes after picking us up. He accepted the ticket cheerfully, then proceeded to tell us that he doesn't pay these tickets, as they're all illegal. He's that kind of guy. He turned out to be quite interesting, having grown up in the remote areas of New Guinea, one of the most dangerous places on earth and where the tribespeople still practice cannibalism. He was deeply

knowledgeable about the history of the earth and development of plant and animal life since the beginning of time. He also entertained us with great stories of crocodiles eating people in Australia.

We visited Mossman Gorge National Park for a guided walk through the rainforest while listening to the flowing water cascading over granite boulders. Next up was a Daintree River Wildlife Cruise where we spotted several crocodiles lounging on the banks of the river, waiting for a baby or small child to fall out of a boat. The boat dropped us on the other side of the river, where we drove to see more of the UNESCO World Heritage Listed Daintree Rainforest, including lookouts with sweeping views extending from the rainforest to the Coral Sea. After a stroll on a beautiful beach, we visited the Noah Valley for



another walk through the rainforest to see more native plants, animals, and their habitats. Then back to the other side of the river on the Daintree River Cable Ferry Crossing to Cape Tribulation, the north end of Australia's east coast civilization and where the rainforest meets the Great Barrier Reef. And that was all before lunch. For dessert we stopped at The Daintree Ice Cream Company which specializes in local and exotic fruit flavors from the rainforest that we never heard of. It was a wonderful day, and we learned a lot about how and why Australia is unique in so many ways. Spoiler: a lot has to do with its isolation.



Wednesday, May 7, 2025 – Port Douglas

Our adventure today was white water rafting on the Barron River in the Barron Gorge National Park. We paddled over grade 3 rapids and peaceful, calm water, surrounded by towering rainforest mountains and giant granite boulders.

We make our way back to Cairns tomorrow afternoon for an evening flight to Sydney, eventually making our way home. We had a great trip to Australia. The people are nice, travel is easy since they speak English that's fairly easy to understand, there



is plenty of natural beauty, the animals are unusual, and the US dollar is strong against the Aussie dollar. It's a huge country, and we can't wait to come back to visit areas we didn't get to.

Thanks for following our travels.  
Love Lori and Stephen