

Travel



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Down under: Sophisticated Sydney dominates coast; inland lies the vast, empty outback region

Last week travel writer William Schemmel told of his adventures aboard a cruise ship traveling the South Pacific. This week he disembarks and explores Australia.

By William Schemmel
special writer

JUST BEFORE dawn, the Royal Viking Star knifes through the fog, and a million lights are visible on the surrounding hillsides. At the end of a two-week cruise through the South Pacific, we are entering Sydney harbor.

I'm standing by the rail, feeling unsettled and a little lost, as the Sydney Opera House, the Harbour Bridge and skyline come into focus. When you've reached Australia, you've gone about as far from the U.S. as it's possible to go. The first few hours ashore only strengthen the feeling that this is a far, far land, with its own tribal customs and exotic speech. A first-timer doesn't comprehend, for instance, that when an Aussie says, "That's a grouse bag of fruit you're wearin', mate," he's paying a compliment to one's suit of clothes.

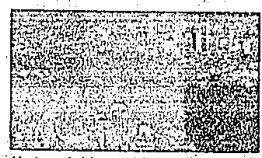
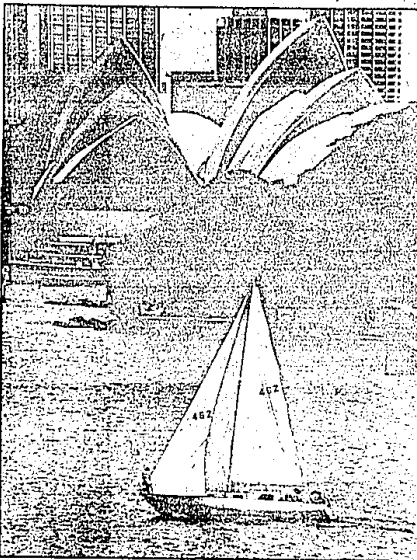
WHEN YOUR ear gets the hang of it, though, you find yourself answering, even when not completely certain of the question: "Too right, mate," and "That's a fair go," as you raise your midday of Toobey's draft to this colorful land Down Under and its 15-million hospitable folk.

Once the language barrier is overcome, you find there's plenty that's familiar in big cities like Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. Aussies have taken to American fast-foods, and our sitcoms and game shows are mainstays of their telly.

It's easy to take to Sydney. Australia's "Leading Lady," as she pegs herself, is a right beaut. The 3.5-million Sydney-ers are more than a fifth of the population of this nation as physically large as the continental U.S.

She's a handsome place, a tad like San Francisco with her spectacular harbor, easy sophistication and electric lifestyle. One of the best ways to orient yourself is on the Sydney Explorer, a special bus that makes a circuit past the major downtown sights.

YOU'RE FREE to hop off whenever the notion strikes — wander through the Royal Botanic Gardens, Chiswickton, a host of museums, and the clam-shell



Harbour bridge and Sydney skyline

Koala and eucalyptus in wildlife sanctuary

Sydney Harbour features sailboat and Opera House

fantasy of the Opera House — then re-board when another bus comes around. Actually "Opera House" is a misleading term since it has five major halls and concerts of all sorts, drama, dance and cinema are also part of its repertoire.

Like any major metropolis, Sydney is a mosaic of neighborhoods. The oldest, called The Rocks, was where His Majesty's prisoners first set foot when exiled from Mother England in the mid-18th century. In recent years, the area has been spruced up as the avenue for restaurants, craft shops, small museums and a visitors center.

In little more than a year, the Regent of Sydney has established itself as the "hotel." Rising 34 stories above the shopping district, it has sweeping views of the harbor. From the Circular Quay, just across

the street, ferries fan out to the city's famous beaches. From a huge selection, Sydney-ers prefer Manly Beach. It's a fair place with more than three miles of pristine sands, pounded by the Pacific Ocean rollers cherished by surfers.

Even on weekdays it's crowded with families, bronzed youngsters, and bony lassies who doff their tops the second their feet touch the sands.

THE FERRY from Circular Quay will also take you to Taronga Zoo, where kangaroos, wallabies, and those lovable koalas cavort in a natural environment.

By day and night, you'll want to explore the colorful streets of Paddington. "Paddo," as this near-downtown neighborhood is affectionately known, is a bit like Greenwich Village, Soho

AYERS ROCK, the world's largest monolith, looms up more than 1,100 feet, with a distance around its base of five and half miles. Made up of a reddish sandstone, the monolith rock takes on an almost hallucinatory quality as it changes colors with the arc of the sun. At sunrise and sunset, it glows ember-like against the stark plain.

People see a rock as imposing as this, and immediately they have to conquer it. Every year, more than 80,000 undertake the rigorous, almost straight-up climb to the top, fully warned by signs at the base that this should not be undertaken lightly.

The rewards for those who make it are panoramic views of the desert, the

blue-silenced mountains and the nearby Uluru. The latter are an ensemble of 23 rock domes that look from the air like a burial ground for gigantic mastodons.

ABOUT FIVE miles from the base is the modern complex of Uluru. It has two deluxe hotels — a Four Seasons and Sheraton — with swimming pools, restaurants, lounges and comfortable guest rooms with air conditioning and TV; also, 3,400 camp sites, shopping, a community center, visitors center and museum.

For information contact Australian Tourist Commission, 650 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10111; 212-469-7550.

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Plymouth hotel man wins award

Scott Lorenz, general manager of the Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth, was awarded one of the five winners of the 1984 Michigan Ambassador of Tourism Awards.



The eleventh annual awards were presented by Gov. James J. Blanchard at the Governor's Conference on Tourism this week in Flint.

Blanchard said in the opening session that Michigan must continue to publicize its tourism attractions and encourage travel and tourism among its citizens.

"State government has a specific role in tourism and in creating an atmosphere to help make tourism grow," Blanchard said.

The governor said this can be achieved by greater legislative support such as the recent enactment of the room assessment tax bill, more aggressive campaigns to assist the traveling public and continued improvement of roads and highways.

LORENZ WAS recognized for creating a Canadian

Par Value Plan, by which Canadian visitors can spend their money at par with American dollars.

He also was cited for founding the Michigan Hot Air Balloon Festival held in Plymouth and the Plymouth Ice Sculpture Spectacular. He was one of the organizers of Circle Michigan, which markets Michigan to the motor coach industry.

Other winners of the awards were freelance travel writer Dixie Franklin of Marquette, cited for her efforts in promoting the Upper Peninsula; retired Grand Rapids Press writer B.G. (Bill) Brown, for 50 years of contributions to the travel industry; James Cordray of Montague, owner of White River Campground, for the development of both campground and canoeing directories; and George Cantor, Detroit

News columnist and one-time travel writer for the Detroit Free Press.

Michigan Embassy of Tourism Awards were also presented at the conference, honoring W.R. Kellogg Company plant tours at Battle Creek, the Yelland Heritage Festival, Michigan Technological University's Winter Carnival, and the Upper Peninsula Rodeo at Iron River.

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