

TRAVEL

Running gives Australia a whole different look

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SPECIAL WRITER

Unless you have months to travel, you must carefully pick and choose the experience you want to have in Australia, not unlike those who visit the United States.

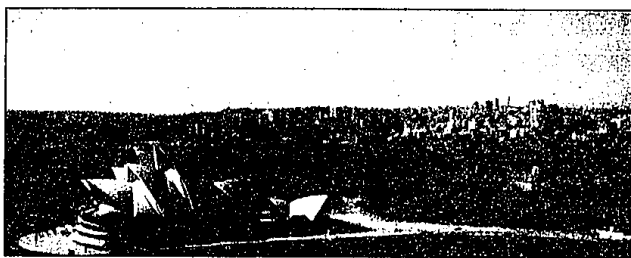
In our little less than two weeks, we chose to stay on one coast to tour Melbourne, Sydney and Cairns (the gateway to the Barrier Reef and Rain Forest). You could equate it to visiting Boston, New York City and a smallish Florida city, such as Fort Lauderdale from which you could enjoy both the ocean and the Everglades.

For those of you who are taking a couple of weeks to attend the Summer Olympics in Sydney in the year 2000, this might be a do-able itinerary.

We began in Melbourne, a charming, comfortable city that's walkability, series of bathhouses along the river and streetcars actually are very reminiscent of Boston.

Since I jog for the better part of an hour each day when I'm away, I often get another perspective. And since we stayed in the heart of the city, I was very appreciative of Melbourne's many parks and gardens which seemed to come up no matter what direction I took.

In one, I came upon a graceful, out-of-the-way memorial to President John F. Kennedy that I didn't see noted in any of our tour books. Later, I read that



Sydney Harbor: The ship-shape Sydney Opera House has become the symbol for Australia's largest and most modern city.

more than a quarter of the city has been set aside as recreational space.

The eyeseeing highlight of Melbourne proper was the Old Melbourne Gaol, the city's original jail-turned-museum where you can tour three levels of cells. The culinary highlight was the Paul Bocuse Restaurant, where over a three-hour period we sampled what a branch of this three-star Parisian restaurant has to offer. The animal highlight was driving out of Melbourne to Phillip Island, where we not only saw the famous sunset parade of fairy penguins come home from the sea, but also a sanctuary of koala bears.

The solid, workman-like charm of Melbourne was an interesting contrast to dazzling, upscale Sydney which, unlike Detroit, has made the most of its waterfront. Although we stayed at a hotel overlooking Sydney Harbour, took a wonderful boat cruise around it and even viewed it from the South East pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, my most extraordinary experience was running it.

Starting at the landmark (but once controversial!) Sydney Opera House on Bennelong Point, you run with the bright blue water of Sydney Harbour on one side and the glorious flowers and greenery of the Royal Botanic

Gardens on the other. At Mrs. Macquarie's Point (named after an 1800's governor's wife) it's fun to take a minute to climb the steps to the small bench carved into the rock, known as Mrs. Macquarie's Chair.

Continuing alongside the water, I came upon curious throngs taking photographs and videos of a giant American nuclear warship that had docked earlier for several days stay. American sailors were visible wherever we went for one day. After that they were apparently allowed to wear civilian clothes and blended into the Sydney scene.

On my way back, the sun setting over the magnificent opera

house and harbour, made for an unforgettable vista.

We had pre-booked a tour, dinner and a performance at the Sydney Opera House, and learned to appreciate it both inside and out. That certainly was a highlight of Sydney, but there were so many. We spent major time in the Rocks area, the birthplace of both Sydney and all of Australia, where the convicts who settled the country first lived.

We took a ferry boat to the zoo, which is vertically situated. A cable car zooms you to the top, then you view the animals along a zigzag path back down. The animals native to Australia are obviously where to spend your time. The giraffes have a magnificent view of Sydney Harbour!

And you can't miss jumping the fabulous waves at Bondi Beach. The sun scare apparently hasn't made it to the land down under, since few beach umbrellas were evident. It's no wonder Australia has a very high incidence of skin cancer.

Australian food was good, if expensive. Favorite dishes included baramundi - a mild, delicious fish - and various preparations of ostrich, kangaroo and emu. If you're a dessert lover, you're in luck. They are, too, and you'll have a wealth of pretty and delicious confections from which to choose.

On to Cairns - pronounced "Cans" - the fast-growing capital of "The Far North" with a charm-

ing town square, a new modern art museum in an old space and the Esplanade, a long stretch along the waterfront.

Running along it at one end of the day or the other, you can be party to boat-watching as the vessels, mostly catamarans, ferry passengers back and forth to the Barrier Reef for a day of scuba and snorkeling.

Cairns is the perfect place to light if you want to experience both the Barrier Reef and the Rain Forest. We spent a day on the reef, a day in the rain forest and a day enjoying Cairns - and felt well satisfied. You can only get a sense of the extensiveness of the Reef from above, so our plane headed home by way of Tokyo allowed this view.

An aerial view of the rainforest is available on the new Skyrail Cableway to Kuranda. We took it one way and the vintage Kuranda Scenic Railroad back, along a trail that reportedly took 1,500 men four years to carve out in the 1880's. A highlight of our day in the rainforest was the Tjankai Dance Theatre, home of the award-winning Aboriginal dance group. It's conveniently located at the base of the Skyrail.

Seeking a piece of Aboriginal art was by far the most interesting shopping of the trip. And keep your wits about you if you're set on taking home Australian-made stuffed kangaroos or koala bears. Many are made in the Far East.

GREAT ESCAPES

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TUSCANY AND UMBRIA

Two tours to the hill towns of Tuscany and Umbria will be held April 30 to May 10 and May 10 to May 22 in cooperation with the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. Shelly Perlove,

professor of art history and director of art administration at the University of Michigan-Dearborn will lead the tours. Janet Torna, executive director of the BBAA, will accompany the May 10 tour. The trips will include stops in Florence, Pisa, Siena, Pistoia, San Gimignano and Assisi (site of recent storm damage to many historic art masterpieces). The April 30 trip is priced at \$3,479 per person double, \$4,119 single; the May 10 trip is priced at \$3,249 per person double, \$3,849 single. The price includes air fare, accommodations in Florence and Siena, sightseeing, museum admission and some meals.

Participation is limited to 25 for the April 30 trip and 30 for the May 10 trip. Those interested are urged to place a \$500 deposit as soon as possible.

For information, call toll free 800-783-2019.

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