

Post



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Our first day in Sydney - April 3, 2025

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SUMMARY

Inauspicious start to our trip. I tripped over my suitcase and hit the floor before we even cleared Customs. First stop - dropped our luggage at hotel. Second stop - the Chemist/Medical Centre where a very nice man fitted me with a wrist brace. Spent the remainder of the day walking (10 miles!) and enjoying Sydney and the gorgeous weather. News flash: the Opera House is not white. It is cream colored and covered in more than 1,000,000 tiles from Sweden. Also, the Royal Botanical Garden would be more appropriately named the Royal Arboretum. - Karen

DETAIL

[Note: If you're looking for a post from April 2nd there is not one. This day was stolen from us, for all eternity, by the International Date Line.]

At midnight Sydney time I wake up, still on the plane. This doesn't bode well for me getting over jet lag. We're halfway to Australia, having just passed Hawaii. The realtime map shows the equator and international date line are still ahead. But at least I got five or six hours of sleep, which isn't bad.

The crew leaves the lights off but hands out a snack and drinks to those few passengers who are awake. We get water and coffee, probably a bad idea. The snack is a gut bomb tasteless Ratatouille Stromboli followed by a dreamy cup of salted caramel ice cream. I surmise the airline isn't interested in this food getting through our digestive system in any kind of hurry.

We drink, eat, and freshen up before settling back in for the last half of our flight. We eventually land at the Sydney Airport, about 20 minutes south of the CBD, Central Business District where we'll be staying. It's clear and sunny.

Off the plane it's a long walk to Immigration and Customs. Based on their warnings, Karen is concerned that we're carrying nuts, protein bars, and food (packaged) from the plane. Due to the country's big agricultural business they're nervous about pests or disease on food brought in from outside the country. They also ask if we're transporting any medicine. Good lord we're American's in our mid-60s, of course we have prescriptions.

As Karen is approaching a customs officer to clarify, she makes a quick turn and pulls her luggage and backpack out of her way. Or at least she tries. The luggage stays put but she continues forward, going face-first, splat on the ground. She hurts her wrists, which she'd done before in a biking accident. The Customs officer is very flustered and scoots us along, post haste. This is Karen's unintended pro tip for anyone wishing to smuggle goods into Australia.

The four of us hop into an oversized taxi to our hotel, the old general post office, built starting in 1866. Tricia and Don paid extra for getting into their room early so we freshen up and leave our bags there.

Outside the weather's beautiful and the temperature is perfect, so we head out for a walk. First stop: the Sydney Harbor Bridge and the Opera House. An enormous cruise ship is in town, between sailings, blocking a lot of the iconic views of the city. We later learn that the few thousand additional people from these ships thankfully don't upset the balance of the five plus million people who call this place home.

It's a long, enjoyable, picturesque walk to the bridge and then to the base of Opera House where we have lunch. Full and relaxed by a good local beer, we walk around the perimeter of the Opera House and into the adjacent Royal Botanical Garden. Back in the day it was only there to be enjoyed by Royals, but now, it's freely open to the public. Last week it was rainy here meaning now it's green and full of locals enjoying the improved weather.

There are cars in the city but not an objectionably large number. There's a metro, which we haven't tried yet. Apparently most people walk or take the public transit, making it a delightful city in which to meander. There are interesting historic buildings and parks everywhere.

Done with the gardens for now Tricia and Don continue their walk to stay awake. Karen and I head back to the hotel to check into our room. The hotel was going to message us if the room was available early, but we've heard nothing. It's a 50-50 chance they didn't message us or our messaging is screwed up due to saving money by using local cell service.

Don gives us an extra key to their room so we can retrieve our luggage. At the hotel, sure enough, our room is ready and they did message us but alas, international cell service can be tricky. We're two doors down from Tricia and Don's room. Yay!

By now, of course, I've lost the extra key to Tricia and Don's room. Earlier I had sweet talked a hotel receptionist into giving us a key to their room (she'd called Tricia to get approval to do this). That receptionist is still working and I'm hoping she remembers me. She was speaking French to a colleague earlier, so I try that angle.

She does remember me and she could give me a key but doesn't want to. She says she wants for me to be in trouble. My fault. Oh my, she really is French! She plays that game for a bit longer but eventually bursts out laughing and gives me the key. Whew!

Re-cleaned and unpacked, we head out again in an effort to stay awake. We restart a DIY guided audio walking tour we'd tried earlier with Tricia and Don. It's fascinating and we learn much about Sydney's history. At the tour's end we head to reconnect with our traveling companions. Karen's 'Find My' app says Tricia's a half mile away, in the botanical garden. It's strange they'd have gone back there (or were still there). Ah yes, Karen recalls, that's where Tricia's phone died. We do more walking ourselves and watch the cruise ship depart.

Don messages us that they're back at the hotel so we head that way, looking for a wine shop and somewhere for dinner as we walk. The Red Bottle has tons of promising bottles of all colors, mostly local, yay, and lots pre-chilled. We don't recall if our room has a fridge so we buy nothing but promise to return.

Finding a restaurant is a bit trickier. We want it not fully booked and definitely not too distant (we've already walked 10 miles today). A tiny hole-in-the-wall Italian place says ~45 minutes and we say 'yes'. Back 45 minutes later with Tricia and Don we find "our table" is still swarming with a large, ravenous Asian family, getting more food delivered while they look over the dessert menu. This restaurant isn't happening.

The bar at our hotel works out perfectly and soon we're sipping on Negronis and Pinot Noir with Caprese Salads and Chicken Satay on the way. The salads are heavenly with lots of basil, watermelon, and ripe, flavorful heirloom tomatoes. We're surprised, given it's barely April, and then remember we're in the southern hemisphere. It's fall, the time of bountiful harvests.

We think back over our long day as we eat. Those strange birds? Don informs us they're Ibises, and Google confirms it. The internet offers up lots of recipes for cooking them, but suggests they may be hard to find, given their protected status. We sadly ponder about similar recipes for the Auk, Dodo, and Carrier Pigeon. Human kind can definitely impact the animal world around us.

We're pleased that we stayed up til 9, soon allowing sleep to carry us off towards tomorrow.

Photos



8:43 Sydney time and we want nothing more than a good cup of coffee (or three)



Our hotel, the old General Post Office. Originally built in the late 1800s. Updated since, thankfully.



The famous Sydney Opera House, peeking out from behind a cruise ship docked in town.



The Sydney Harbor Bridge, with both the Australian flag and the flag of the aboriginal people flying at the top.



Often another view of the Sydney Opera House, currently obscured.



Tricia and Don documenting their achievement of visiting all seven continents (on this planet).



People doing the bridge walk. We do not have this planned, but the views are supposed to be spectacular.



Fish tacos and sweet potato fries for lunch.



Viewing the opera house up close.



FARNSNIENTE



Many Ibises in the Royal Botanical Gardens.



The cruise ship heading out to sea. We're concerned that it will hit the Opera House, but trust that the captain knows what he () is doing.

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