

Post



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Fig-eating Flying Foxes - April 4, 2025

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SUMMARY

Great private car tour across the Harbor Bridge, thru North Sydney and all the way out to Bondi Beach. Trip lived up to its "Hidden Gems" moniker with lots of cool stops for nice walks and photo ops off the beaten path. - Karen

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DETAIL

Yesterday was our first day in Sydney. With enough qualifications maybe everyday can be some sort of first day. Today's our first day waking up in Sydney and also having a scheduled activity. We're to get picked up for a private city tour at 8 a.m.

It looks like another gorgeous day with lots of blue skies. Daniel, our tour guide, is driving a newish Suzuki sedan rental as his own car is in the shop. First stop is the close end of the Sydney Harbor bridge for orientation and a look at the Opera House.

He gives us water and says it's going to be hot today (75 degrees when we translate from celsius). We're from Texaxs, we'll be fine. We discuss units of measurement here. They use all metric other than a person's height, which is in feet and inches. Sounds bit like the British who are all metric save for a guy's weight (in stones and pounds).

He takes our pictures in front of the harbor with the opera house in the distance. A quick drive takes us past the opera house to a spot on the exact opposite side for a different view. Overhead are huge fig trees (aka Ficus, aka Banyan), an extension of the botanical garden. Daniel shows us some of their small figs. The ground is littered with them. Reportedly fruit bats come here each evening at dusk for dinner. What kind of fruit bats? Grey-headed Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) with a wingspan of 3 to 4 feet. That we may have to see!

We admire the opera house from this other side, and behind it the harbor bridge. The curved lines of the opera house line up pretty perfectly with the bridge from this vantage-point. We're told that was intentional. In the bright sun the opera house's tiles (from Sweden) look white, but they're really cream colored.

We discuss the bridge which opened in 1932. It's as long as it needs to be to span the harbor opening, so it's not the longest bridge in the world but, until recently, it was the widest. It has traffic lanes for bicycles, two directions of commuter trains, car traffic in two directions, and a lane for pedestrians. Sounds very civilized.

We see more Ibises (known here as 'Bin Chickens'). This is similar to how we refer to raccoons as Trash Pandas because they rummage through our trash cans. Here an Ibis will rifle through your rubbish bin. There's no eating Ibises here, but you can easily find Kangaroo meat ("jump steak") at the local grocery store. The two biggest chains of groceries in Australia? Woolworth and Coles. We'll have to seek one out.

As we stand there, along walkway on the shore of the harbor, an endless string of joggers/walker goes by. Quite a few are in tutus and most have official event numbers pinned to their shirts. It's an annual charitable fund-raiser for mental health, the CoastTrek. It goes 50 km (31 miles) or less, per your preference. The route goes along the coast from Manly Beach across the bridge and down to Bondi Beach. We'll end up seeing these people all day long as both they, and we, visit much of the coastline near Sydney.

We cross the Harbor Bridge by car, not paying the \$3.50 as we're traveling north (the "free" direction). We back down to the water through some very cute (and undoubtedly very expensive) neighborhoods. Out of the car again we're on a small beach with yet another great view of the bridge and opera house. Before the bridge it's be a long drive, or shorter boat ride, from the Sydney city center. To our right is a funhouse, carnival-type amusement park from the 1930s, about the same time the bridge was built. Uphill from there are high rise apartments/condos, one of which is owned by Nicole Kidman and husband Kieth Urban. No, Daniel never sees them wandering around town. Up on the bridge we see more runners.

Over here on the north side of the harbor we drive past the Admiralty House, the home of the Governor General, i.e. King Charles' rep here. This is also where royals and their entourage stay when in town and as such it's massive. Nextdoor is the somewhat smaller Kirribilli, the Prime Minister's residence (when he's in Sydney). Both are impressive with great views and lots of Jacaranda trees. We're told they's absolutely spectacular in the spring.

We do more driving, seeing more cute neighborhoods and more coastline with runners. We stop for lunch in Watson Bay at the Watson Bay Fish and Chippery. Delicious and good beer. Over lunch we beseech our driver, Daniel, to teach us some bad words or expressions in the "local language". It's English, of course, but they must have some regional swear words or such. Like how in the UK (we tell him) "bloody" is a word you don't use in polite company, and a bum is a female's private parts.

One tame (lame?) example he comes up with is how we talk about a thong being a lady's skimpy underwear. Here it means flip-flops. It changes the meaning of "The girls walked through town not wearing any thongs"

He also remembered a marketing campaign for the Australian state of the Northern Territories, which normally just goes by "NT" (just as Sydney's New South Wales is shortened to NSW). The ads encouraged people to visit the NT, with its logo plastered on hats, T-shirts and posters. It was trying to say "See You in the Northern Territories" but it was just four letters, the "See You" being CU and the Northern Territories being "NT". (The "in the" we're just small letters in between). Check out the included picture. Well they say no publicity is bad publicity.

We drive past more of the Cliff Top Walk, it's impressive. You really can walk along the tops of the cliffs, overlooking the Pacific and the beautiful coastline for an incredible distance. The views are divine, and word is they're extending the walk even further.

We stop again at the famous Bondi beach (pronounced Bond-eye). It's named for the aboriginal word meaning the sound of the waves crashing against the cliffs. It's a Friday and there are tons of people soaking in the sun and surfing.

We see a store amusingly named "The Budgie Smuggler" (a Budgie being a small local bird). Apparently around here that's a long time slang name for a speedo-style bathing suit as it looks like you're smuggling a Budgie low in your swim trunks. Cute.

Before long we are back at our hotel We thank Daniel for a fun day and head up to our rooms. We change our upcoming flight to Hobart. It had been at 10 a.m. but the airline moved it up to a 7 am departure. We're supposed to be checked in and luggage handed over two hours before the flight time. Being AT the airport at 5 am didn't sound like any fun.

For dinner we walk to dinner at The China Doll, just down the way from the impressive home of Russel Crowe. The joint is jumping and the people are very dressed up (and/or skimpily clothed). The place seems very chic and our waitress is loads of fun.

Overhead we spot those fruit bats flying towards the huge ficus trees in the botanical garden for their dinner. We contemplate our jet lag, or lack thereof. Might we have gotten over it already?

Photos



The start of our day-long tour of Sydney. Looking towards North Sydney, across the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Another beautiful day.



With our fun and cheeky local, Daniel. A great tour guide.



The view from McMahons Point in North Sydney, the bridge and opera house in the distance.



Looking back towards CBD, the Central Business District. Underfoot? The M1 motorway which runs in a tunnel beneath us, running under the harbor and coming up beyond the opera house. I'm blocking a sign explaining that if there's a fire in the tunnel this is where the smoke will be exhausted. Be forewarned.



Yet another view of the opera house and bridge. The opera house was designed and situated for this vantagepoint. The lines of the two are supposed to align. Check!



Two properly attired (and maybe tired) walkers partaking in the Manley Beach to Bondi Beach Cliff-Top Walk Charity event.



A Rainbow Lorikeet looking out from it's nest in a huge Banyon tree to ensure we're not getting to close to it's young family.



Some blooming flora at Parsley Beach. It's fall here but there are lots of flowers. Enough rain and sunny cool weather will do that to a place.



The pedestrian bridge overlooking Parsley Beach. Yes, this is also part of the charity walk.



No publicity is bad publicity. Part of the promotional campaign put on by the Northern Territories Tourist Board. One should read this shirt as "See You in the Northern Territories". I don't know what you were thinking (wink).



I called this a Sharpei Tree (like the dog breed) but really it's a Banksia Tree, named for Sir Joseph Banks (maybe also of Banksia rose fame?) The flowers (not shown here) are wild, like a bottle brush but yellow, and bloom year-round.



The Macquarie lighthouse, the oldest and longest serving lighthouse in Australia. They're normally put next to the entrance to the harbor. Not this one, much to the dismay of the 121 passengers of The Dunbar (of 122 total passengers) who lost on their lives when the captain made this mistake. The survivor? He became the keeper at the new, more appropriately located Barnet lighthouse.



Part of the cliff-top walks. With good eyes (and a better picture) you could see the walking path, and walkers, snaking off into the distance.



The beach part of Bondi beach. There are sunners and bathers, but nothing like on a weekend at the height of summer (i.e. Christmas).



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from a recent bad storm smashed glass from the building above. As such the pool's been drained to clean up the glass. Yikes.



Our room at The Fullerton Hotel, formerly with General Post Office. Why you needed 14' ceilings in a post office, I do not know. We have a historical tour of the place scheduled for Tuesday.



Dinner down the way from Russel Crowe's place, at The China Doll in Woolloomooloo. I'm guessing the local signmakers have to order lots of extra O's. Not shown here are the fruit bats, Grey-Headed Flying Foxes with a 3-4' wing-span, which we later saw flying overhead on route to their dinner.

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