

Post



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# Kangaroos, champagne and chocolate - April 15, 2025

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## ***SUMMARY***

Spent the day in the Yarra Valley wine region including "brunch" at Domaine Chandon, with a beautiful facility and grounds. We each got a flight of 4 different, delicious sparkling wines they make so in all, tasted 16! We did a cheese tasting at the Yarra Valley Dairy, a chocolate tasting at Yarra Valley Chocolaterie and a wine tasting at Yering Station. SUCH a good day! Finished with a very successful search for kangaroos where we watched a herd of about 40 of them grazing in the early evening. - Karen

## *DETAIL*

### **Kangaroos and more kangaroos**

Today is one of those hybrid days. We're on our own in the morning, like a little 'down day', and then we're on a guided tour by bus in the afternoon. First thing, Tricia, Don and Karen Uber over to the QVM, the Queen Victoria Market, for a look around and I hang in the room, catching up on the blog and relaxing.

The report from the QVM is that it's impressive and big. It's old. It's been around since doing things to honor Queen Victoria was a thing (i.e. the late 1800s). A couple of sections are being refurbished (definitely needed after all this time) so some things (clothes? nicknacks?) aren't currently on offer. Anyway, that's my takeaway from not having been there. Before they left, Karen asked if I wanted anything. "Breakfast" was my reply, and Karen came through, as always.

We enjoy our meal up in Tricia and Don's room. I pace out their living room and it's 250 square feet. Adding in their bedroom, bathroom, water closet, closet/changing room, and entry/foyer, it's well over 600 sq ft. I look it up and the average Tokyo apartment (not counting hall, laundry, and balcony) is 420 square feet.

Our tour of the Yarra Valley Wine region has been all over the map, and it hasn't even started. We were going to take a train to the starting point, and now they're picking us up. It was going to be just us four, and now it's a group of a dozen. Pick up time was 11:20, then 11:15, 11:30, and finally we see them at 11:45. Oh, well. Mark is our driver. He seems shy and 'a man of few words' which is less than ideal for a guide, but he opens up. At least he's from the area, born here and does know the region.

The ride out to the Yarra Valley is ninety minutes. Mark fills the time with the history and explanation of the sights we're passing. Melbourne was voted the most livable city in Australia for many years in a row, it got good marks for its free trolley all over the CBD (Central Business District) but gets downgraded for not having a train out to the airport. So do they have one now, I ask? Hell, no.

We drive through one trendy part of the city after another. Trendy seems to mean "not in the major commercial area, lots of inexpensive old buildings that need to be refurbished, and a little rundown looking". On the freeway a flock of cockatoos flies overhead. What a country.

Across the freeway we see strange trees. They're eucalyptus but they appear to have eggplant fruit hanging everywhere in the branches. Those are fruit bats. The grey-faced flying foxes. They sleep during the day and wake at dusk to go eat fruit, tree sap, flower pollen. It sounds like a sight to see.

We learn who else is on our bus with us. The two Americans are cousins from San Diego and Vermont (one's living in Melbourne for now), a couple from Japan, and a foursome from Hong Kong. For the Asians the bus ride's a good opportunity to sleep.

The city gives way to suburbia and then to crops and pastures. We see cows, sheep, goats and horses, and before long we see mostly grape vines. The Yarra Valley has 80 wineries, we're told. We pass the house of Nelly Melba, the opera singer of long ago. Melba was her stage name, which came from here, her hometown of Melbourne. In her honor famed French chef Auguste Escoffier invented (and gave her stage name to) Melba toast and the Peach Melba. Who knew?

At Domaine Chandon, Don Chandler (whose name we frequently shorten to 'Don Chan') realizes that Chandon and Don Chan are just flip-flops of one another. At the winery we were to have a tasting, and then it was to be a full brunch, and later just a flight of sparkling wine tastes and two charcuterie boards. We don't know what's right, but that's a lot of flip flopping. It was quite weird because at the same time we're getting all of that stuff (that we paid for) everyone else is just getting four small tastes of bubbly. The haves and have nots, it felt like. We work through it and it's fine. The sparkling wines are delicious (mostly) and the food is flavor packed and local.

Next stop is a cheese tasting. They don't normally do groups but they're hosting us, so we have to be on our best behavior. Seven cheeses to sample (and just the four of us, again embarrassingly, are getting each a glass of wine). The cheeses are divine and the hostess is very sweet. We buy some cheese.

Next on to Yerling Station for wine. The tasting group before us is running late so we follow the suggestions and buy ourselves a glass of wine, it's very good. We get to know our other American tour partners. They're fun and a hoot. We have lots in common.

We learn about Yerling. In the 1870s there was gold in these parts and wealth everywhere. A winery was started. Then there was the long drought. No grapes, no nothing, just cattle. Pull the vines! Hence the "Station" in the vineyard's name. The water came back, followed by the vines, but the name stuck.

Our host for the wine tasting is Flynn. He's confident, thin, tall, blond, and local. He played an English prince in some play in his younger years and we kid him that the accent stuck (versus the Aussie accent he should have, given that he's from here). He purchased a bottle of the good stuff from the winery but is saving it for his 25th birthday, in four years! The tasting is fun and the wines are amazingly good. We buy a bottle.

Our last commercial stop is for a chocolate tasting. It's in the small chain of the same big store we were at yesterday. Here we're having a formal tasting. In the big tasting room there are napkins and glasses of water around one very long table. Our host for the tasting did not want to be photographed. Witness Protection Program? It was a little strange. She explained, hurriedly, how chocolate was made and then - one by one - she passed out a small sample of one of the products they sell in the shop next door. One napkin, one sample. There are at least fifteen things we're tasting!

On about item number 10 it becomes clear there are two more napkins than there are people. One of the extra napkins is next to me and I am informally guarding it. She dropped the sample onto that napkin, now brimming with the previous samples and asks "Is anyone here?" I reply "Are we required to answer truthfully?" She chuckles and says she'll let it slide. On the other side of the table, next to Don, at the second person-less napkin, she again asks "Is anyone here?" I reply "You sure do ask a lot of questions." She says she just does not wish for the chocolate to go to waste. We assure her this will not happen.

On the drive back we stop at a golf course. Soon we see a few kangaroos munching on the fairways. Then more, then dozens. There are mums and joeys. We see joeys dive into their mother's pouch, gangly legs sticking out. We see mothers bent over grazing and little joey, legs still sticking out, with their heads out as well, also munching on the grass. We slowly drive on and see more and more kangaroos. Dozens upon dozens, maybe a few hundred in all. We stop and walk among them (well, close). They will run off, but mostly they're used to us. It's fun watching them.

Takeout dinner in our room, with a beer from the bar downstairs. Tomorrow we move on. Our group has mixed feelings about how Marvelous Melbourne is, but I think it's tops.

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## Photos



Not QVC, but the QVM, the Queen Victoria Market. With eggs and they're cheap! We're not in the USA.



Leaving our hotel for our bus tour we discover this little stairwell. Fancy Schmancy!



So many big, ornate buildings in Marvelous Melbourne. That money from the discovered gold had to go somewhere.



Funny looking trees, seemingly with big fruit. It's fruit bats. Grey-faced flying foxes. Sleeping during the day.



It's fall so harvest time. We're told they "put up nets" (what a job!) to protect from birds, bats, etc. etc. No tours of these facilities. Too easy to bring in pests or disease from the outside. You can't even take produce or honey between states here!



Are we in California? At Domaine Chandon (with Don Chan, aka, Don Chandler).



Flights of sparkling wine. The only way to start a day. No wonder the girls are smiling.



And good food, too. Yum!



More food? Say Cheese! Good stuff, all.



Tall, lean, young Flynn, appearing to cast a spell on the ladies. It seemed to work, they were under his spell. Maybe it was the wine.



Waiting at the chocolate factory/store for our tasting. While waiting we can admire the view of the Yarra Valley.



Just some of what we tried. Yum, yes please.



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ivium with joey, getting a bit big for the pouch. The legs barely fit. No one cares, it seems.



And the legs sticking out didn't preclude also poking the head out for a quick bite while mum feeds.





So many kangaroos, so little time. The distended pouches are full of a joey. Gentle, strange creatures. We're entranced.

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