

Post



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# ANZAC day is pretty much a coin toss - April 25, 2025

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## ***SUMMARY***

This was Anzac Day, a national holiday rather like our Veterans' Day but taken much more seriously. Scott attended the dawn ceremony and found it very moving. The rest of us, having, as mentioned previously, over-indulged the day before opted to sleep in. Tricia and Don had some quality time with a koala and then went on a plane ride to view more of the Great Barrier Reef. Scott and I spent a lazy morning with pool time. After lunch we met back up with T&D at the marina to observe a gambling game called Two-up which is only played in the afternoon on Anzac Day. Took the shuttle to One Tree Hill for drinks and a spectacular sunset.

Back to the marina for a delicious Italian dinner at Romano's. - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

The holidays for Good Friday, Easter, etc. weren't that long ago, but today's already another one: ANZAC day. This is essentially (I think) veteran's day for Australia and New Zealand. They fought together in World War I (as the Australia New Zealand Army Corp) and sadly it did not go well. The reinforcements they were told would be there never showed thus there were a lot of casualties. But I'm speaking way beyond my knowledge of the history.

What I do know is this morning is the annual commemoration and it's starting at 5:30 am. I just happen to be up at 5, so what the heck. Leaving the hotel I realize I have no idea where the event will be held. "On the beach" but it's a long beach and it's pitch black. Thankfully a ton of other people are already streaming in that direction. We end up in a large open air auditorium with a few hundred chairs. Out front on the lawn, there's a podium and half-mast Australian flag. It's a classy set up.

The chaplain who leads the event is probably well beyond his 80th birthday. He does an excellent job. As we've become a custom, the service begins with the standard acknowledgment (this time by two local school children) of on whose land we are assembled, and an expression of respect for the elders of the original people of Australia, past, present, and emerging.

In the opening remarks the chaplain asks the question "Why are we here?" For me this was a very appropriate question, but I'm sure a different one from most other attendees. The answer, of course, is to honor those who died, suffered, and were wounded in the battle in Gallipoli and everywhere else the Australian/New Zealand forces have fought.

He says back then we were not accepting bullies imposing their will, and trying to form a new world order. He connects that to today, where the world is still an uncertain place, and where there still are bullies wishing to have things their way. I couldn't imagine of whom he was speaking!

He connects the event to what went on back in World Wars I and II, and to this place: Hamilton Island. Apparently submarines and other fighting vessels found shelter here in the myriad of WhitSunday Islands. There were big Japanese submarines, waiting for the large ships out in the open waters, but here there was safety.

A hymn is sung, and a prayer is prayed, and wreaths are layed (lain?), lots of them, by various groups and organizations. Next a traditional poem is read, apparently this is always done for Anzac Day. We are specifically asked *not* to stand as the readers are two young (and thus short) children. By not standing we are able to actually see them.

A very moving part of the ceremony is the playing of Last Call, a traditional tune intended to let all the combatants know that the battle is over and to find out who is left alive. The first half of the piece plays and then there's a long minute of silence while they wait for the response that will never come. We just hear the haunting sounds of waves lapping on the shore. As the last half of the song is played, the flag is slowly raised to full staff.

For the singing of the national anthem, we again stand and are invited to sing-along. I don't see anyone singing along and don't understand. It turns out they do the New Zealand national anthem first, then the Australian one (and people do sing along for that one). And the first half of the New Zealand anthem is sung in Maori, which really threw me. I knew my hearing is bad, but jeez.

The ceremony started at 5:30 in the dark. Sunrise isn't far off and we were very close to that as the service is ending. It seemed appropriate. Out of the darkness and into the light. Good service. I'm sure many of these people will be back here next year.

I fetch Karen and we consider doing the hotel breakfast buffet. How much?  
AU\$122 (for the two of us), thank you no!  
It's a holiday so there's a 15% surcharge (so employees can get double pay) which explains part of why it seems so expensive. Our math tells us that on a regular day breakfast for two here would be AU\$106 and even that would be too much. We'll go elsewhere.

At the Marina Café, we split a vegetable breakfast bowl. It's really tasty and healthy and Karen notes the ingredients so we can make it at home. Grilled halloumi seems to be having a moment. We hang out at one of the enormous pools here. All the pools are clean and big and beautifully landscaped. There are a ton of people all hanging out but it doesn't feel crowded. In the shade we sit and read and people watch.

After lunch we go back and chill in our room, waiting for Tricia and Don's return. They are doing a 'wildlife adventure' (really more intended for the kids) and then a small plane flight over the Great Barrier Reef. They've come this far, right? On our balcony we notice a couple of cockatoos have found our drying clothes and they're checking them out. Shoo, you beautiful birds!

Reunited, the four of us head into town and down to the marina. The holiday crowds are very much out. We go to a casual outdoor bar where a large number of people playing "two-up", the flipping of two coins from a small board. It's a gambling game that's OK to play, but only today. The result of the coin toss will be either two coins up, two coins down, or one up and one down. Bettors solicit a bet by tapping some piece of paper currency on their head to indicate they want to bet heads on the next flip and does anybody want to take the bet? If yes, the entire bet is held by the person hoping for the heads outcome. A mixed result gets redone. There's lots of betting, cheering and especially lots of drinking. We have one beer, place zero bets, and head out.

Our next stop is One Tree Hill by bus to watch the sunset (at the One Tree Hill bar, of course). It takes forever to catch the bus, then it tours the whole island before it gets to our stop. Fun tour, actually. Along the route we are joined by loads of hotel and other workers getting off their shift. They're headed back to the company supplied housing. We gather that's where everyone lives. The company supplies the job, the uniform, the housing, a store at which to shop, etc. etc. What a life.

At the bar there are already lots of people there, all for the sunset but everyone feels compelled to get a beer or cocktail. The place is known for its sunsets and not its drinks. Sunset is pretty good, drinks are borderline awful, but they're expensive. Add 15% for ANZAC Day to each drink and it's ridiculously expensive.

After the pretty sunset we hoof it home (it'd be another hour to wait for the bus). It's fairly dark and we see more huge fruit bats flying overhead. We don't have a dinner reservation but Don asks anyway at Romanos and yes, we can have dinner, albeit if we're OK with a limited menu and to sitting on high stools at a bar table. We are and we are. Dinner and drinks are both excellent. Our server is from Montpellier, France so we parlez the French. She does live in the employee housing on the island. It's OK, but she doesn't get to choose her roommate.

We all hike back to the hotels for our last night on this idyllic Hamilton Island. Tomorrow we fly on to our last stop on our Australia tour. We're sad at the thought, but always happy to get back home to good Mexican food. We always thought we would enjoy our Australia trip, but pretty much every city has beaten our expectations by a lot. May have to come back, if energy, health, and finances allow.

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## Photos



It's 5:15 am on April 25th, ANZAC Day. I got out of our room without waking Karen. Preparations done, the commemoration will commence in 15 minutes.



I find a seat inside, with a couple hundred other faithful. I'm in long sleeves and long pants, wanting to show proper respect. Based on how the locals dress, that's not expected.



The Chaplin who conducted the commemoration did an outstanding job. For this reading we're asked to remain seated (so that we can actually see the 'performers').



Out of the darkness, into the light. By the end of the ceremony sunrise was well underway.



Back to the room to change into short everything (shirt/pants) and to collect Karen. We walk 'downtown' for breakfast. We love looking at (and benefitting from the shade of) all these amazing spreading fig trees.



As we walk we're close to a wallaby in the bushes, looking for food. We and the wallaby are both fairly comfortable with the proximity.



Veggie Brekky Bowl is delicious. We note the ingredients to have a re-do back in Austin.



Chilling in the room we're visited (as we often are) by hungry (and pretty) cockatoos. Note the high tide in the background.



Tricia and Don are off having fun at a wilderness experience and later at an hour-long plane ride out over the Great Barrier Reef. Here Tricia's doing a 'backside fur softness check'. She approves.



Karen and I hanging out in the shade by the pool, well not too far away. There's a swim-up bar that we think would be fun to patronize (so we can say we did it) but being ANZAC day, that's not possible until after 1 pm.



At lunch we notice the 'anti-bird spikes' above the oscillating fan. I hadn't thought about it, but Karen notes how unpleasant it would be having lunch here, with a bird sitting atop the whirring fan. Talk about the shit hitting the fan! Not my kind of broadcasting.



Pretty arrangement of sailboats on Catseye Beach.



Later, back in the room, a cockatoo comes and checks out the towel and clothes we have drying out there. Note the low tide in the background.



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Enough relaxing, it's ANZAC Day, time to drink and gamble. Two-up. A short, flat stick, two coins, bettors, and alcohol, what could possibly go wrong?



The volunteer coin flipper, with the stick holding the two coins. And the 'facilitator', helping people make their bets. Bets are all between two people. Two coins up is up, two down is down. One of each is a reflip. Lots of alcohol here, but not a lot of skill. OK today only.



Enough of drinking at the Two-Up event, it's time for drinks watching the sunset up on One Tree Hill.



Afterwards we walk home. It's kind of dark. Nothing is far on the island.

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