

Post



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Birds, butterflies, and rainforests - April 27, 2025

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SUMMARY

Organized tour to the Barron Gorge National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Kuranda village. The trip up to the village was by SkyRail gondola over the rainforest with awesome views. There were two stops along the way, first at Red Peak for a (board)walk in the primordial forest which we were told was 180,000,000 years old. Second stop was at the Barron Falls overlook. Wow, the Falls, huge and deep, deep in the gorge, were really spectacular! We had several hours to spend in Kuranda Village - Scott and I did the Bird Experience (wowza) and the Butterfly Experience (meh) and had a nice German lunch for a change of pace. The

trip back to Cairns was via an old-timely train past Stony Creek Falls and with a stop at Barron Falls to see it from the other side. Still spectacular! We had “gold class” which entitled us to nuts, cheese and sorbet and almost unlimited drinks. Spent the evening chilling in our room. - Karen

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DETAIL

Our bus up to the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway isn't until 8:15, so Karen and I head out for an early coffee and breakfast. Overhead we see blue sky, sunshine and big electronic billboards encouraging us to vote one way or another in the upcoming election. The rallying cry of “Keep pathology bulk purchased!” is a head scratcher.

Flat whites are all delicious down here and the vegetable egg plate with sourdough is yummy. Trip Advisor comes through again.

As we wait for our bus up to the Barron Gorge National Park, many walking by us are dressed and geared up to go see the Great Barrier Reef. We're on a bus to start, going through town, but we'll be on a few gondolas and a train, as well, for our day's travels.

Our bus driver chit chats about the Cairns (population only 150,000) and its history. We quickly see countryside, cows, and sugarcane. The 17° south latitude, mapped to the northern hemisphere, would go through the Caribbean island of Antigua, and through the countries of Belize and Guatemala. We're fairly close to the equator.

For the Skyrail (gondola) ride we have to convert our paid reservation numbers into actual tickets. As we're doing this the girls realize we have six tickets for the four of us. They're not cheap so we spend a minute on the phone trying to straighten out our mistake.

We have to ride three separate gondolas to get up to Kuranda Village. At the first of the two stops we have a short walk through an interesting rain forest, complete with signs and a park ranger pointing stuff out and explaining how things work. There are wild animals in the rainforest but we probably won't see them. We do see a scary looking golden orb-weaver spider. We don't see any southern cassowary (up to 5' 11" tall) with a big hard bone casse (from the French word for 'helmet') sitting exposed menacingly on the top of it's head. We walk by some extremely tall, ramrod straight trees, and we marvel at huge platforms, made entirely of ferns, where they've pretty much created their own environment in which to live.

At our second stop we get different views of a very impressive waterfall. Although the river was dammed not too long ago, and that changed how the falls look, they're still very impressive. We're here towards the tail end of the wet season so we're seeing it in all its glory.

Off the tramway we're now in the small village of Kuranda, 25 kilometers from Cairns and 500 meters (1,640 feet) above sea level. The village is surrounded by the oldest living rainforest (we're told). When the five mile long series of gondolas was installed here they had to remove trees which were subsequently replanted. We can't see any evidence of the installation. We also (looking down) can not see the rainforest floor, it's just too dense with growth.

The main little road through the village is lined with gum/banyon/fig trees (?) with massive "trunks" made up of hundreds of smaller trunks. There's a seemingly unlimited number of shops with gifts, souvenirs, clothes, jewelry, food, etc. We buy ANZAC cookies (really good and they last back to Austin) and a very pretty skirt for Karen.

For lunch we have German food, finally! Bratwurst, sauerkraut, German potato salad, and German beer. Very good. We forgo seeing more koalas at that 'show' but we do pay to see BirdWorld and the Butterfly Exhibit. Both had birds or butterflies just flying around freely around you (within a really large cage). Not so many butterflies (they don't live very long) but lots of different kinds of birds, including a scary and unhappy looking cassowary.

After a beer at the pub we catch the included train ride back to Cairns. It's an old rail line and looks like the fancy cars from the Orient Express. Since we're on a 'not cheap' tour, we're in the fancy car, complete with a yummy snack and unlimited beer, wine, or bubbly. They warn us that it's not really 'all you can drink' but rather just until you've had too many. We had a goodly number (you have to get your money's worth, right?) but others around us seemed to be taking this to be a challenge, yikes, they drank a lot of beers.

Along the way we hear how the rail was laid. The canyon was not ideal for this and it was hard work. Back then there was high unemployment so workers were easy to come by. If hired, you had to supply your own shovel or pick axe or whatever. It's a rain forest so it rained a lot. Quite a few workers lost their lives and sadly the occasional horse would get so badly mired in the mud they couldn't get it out and simply had to put it down. Ugh. The royals of the day came to see this amazing work, mid-completion of course, and the lengths they went to for the safety of those few humans was extraordinary. Other people, expendable.

We have great views on the way down and stop once to get more pictures of the falls (from the opposite side). Mind the gap! In town we said our good byes to our three servers. They had been waiting on us hand and foot for more than an hour but no tip was expected and none was offered by anyone. Not the culture here.

In town we walk the half-mile or so back to our hotel. No need for dinner so we simply make it an early night. Tomorrow we fly to Sydney, the first leg of our trip home from this wonderful country.

Photos



Weather can't decide between sun or clouds. Big cruise ship in port. Surely we saw some of the passangers up in Kuranda today.



Bus first, then gondola above the rain forest canopy. Very green. No way to see the rain forest floor.



Such big, tall, straight hardwood trees. No wonder they're so attractive to the timber industry. They're virgin wood that's been growing here since before time.



From the gondola we see the waterfall and beyond that the train on the other side of the canyon. It's stopped to let riders take pictures of the falls.



There are informative signs every so often as we hike through the rain forest. Thank goodness the local language here is English.



The falls are wide and loud. They seem to go on forever. They were a sacred place for the aboriginal people who lived here for many tens of thousands of years. I'm sure the concessionairs here are guarding it well too, now.



The water that's headed for the falls.
Karunda just ahead.



The big trees that line the main (only?) street of Kuranda Village. So many trunks that you can't see the actual trunk.



Lots to buy including these native decorated boomerangs. You're sure to return to Australia if you buy one. (Maybe next visit)



A really old plane crash? Actually there wasn't one. The plane was brought to the forest and made to look this way for some movie.



Lunch. German food at last! Yum.



Colorful birds. Painting their bodies with color to attract a mate. Thank goodness us humans have grown out of that habit!



One of two pink birds. Pretty but always preening.



Southern cassowary, up to 6' tall. That bone visible on the head lets them hear sounds of very low frequency. Maybe to warn them of an approaching dinosaur?



Pretty butterflies, but not a zillion of them.



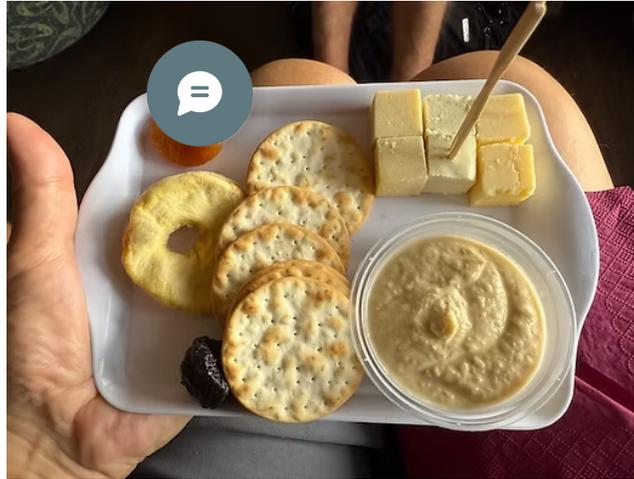
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The train ride back. We get wine and beer and food. Karen asked if there was a table. The lady pointed at this 3" piece of wood bolted to the side.



Stopping for a selfie in front of the falls.



More lunch (and dinner, as it turns out).



Crossing a bridge by another falls.



Old style train car, well fixed up. Looking at pictures from the day.

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