

Australia

The Best Things to See & Do



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Australia Travel Guide

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1. Introduction

Australia is a dream destination for many people and, because it is so far away from the rest of the world, often a once-in-a-lifetime vacation trip.

Australia is the oldest, flattest, driest continent on our planet and has the least fertile soils. Because it separated from other major land masses millions of years ago, much of the flora and fauna in Australia is unique.

Indigenous Australians inhabit the continent for about 65,000 years. Dutch explorers spotted Australia for the first time in 1606 and England claimed Australia's eastern half in 1770.

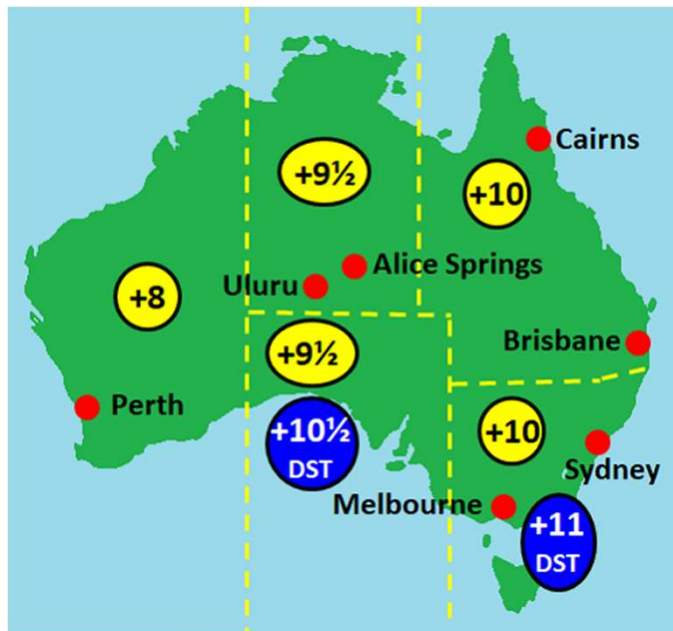
Since ancient times, the name Terra Australis (Southern Land) was used for a hypothetical continent south of the equator. After the land was discovered and drawn on maps, the name Terra Australis was consequently used. Due to the Dutch influence, the name Nieuw-Holland or New Holland became more popular, however.

After his circumnavigation and mapping of the continent, British navigator and cartographer Captain Matthew Flinders used the name Australia because it was "more agreeable to the ear" than Terra Australis. In 1817, the name Australia was used officially for the first time.

And, of course, there are more modern unofficial names like "Oz", "the Land Down Under" and "Down Under".

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- Time zones



- Australia is divided into 5 time zones which follow the state borders. Only 2 of the time zones follow daylight savings time and two of the time zones are shifted by 30min instead of entire hours.

This travel guide provides a 2 week sample itinerary with detailed information on the individual destinations.

To help you find out what best fits you, I have added lots of photos and links to additional reviews.

This is not an in-depth Australia guide. You can buy those from the big travel guide companies.

My goal is to help you Make Memorable Moments on a relaxing Iceland trip by helping you build the perfect itinerary for you.

Please also check out the other exciting destinations and travel guides on our [Backpack & Snorkel](https://backpackandsnorkel.com) website.

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2.1 Disclaimer

In this guide I am doing my best to give you the most accurate information. Over time, however, prices, times, and even attractions are subject to change. Therefore, I and backpackandsnorkel.com cannot be held responsible for the experiences of users while traveling. I strongly suggest that you write or call the attractions you plan to visit for confirmation when you make your travel plans.

Also, please stay alert, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets and other criminals can easily ruin even the best planned vacation.

2.2 Copyright

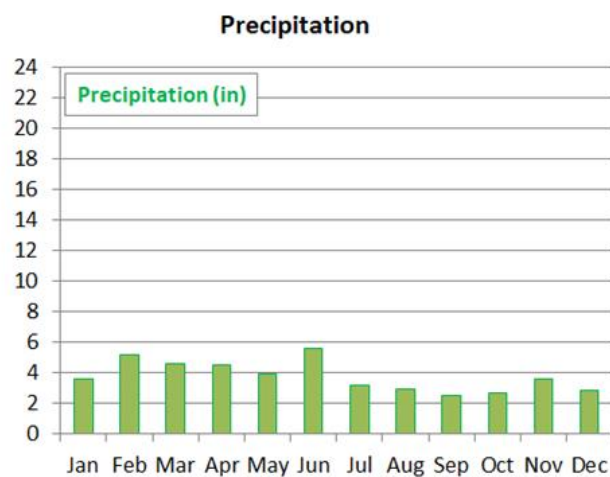
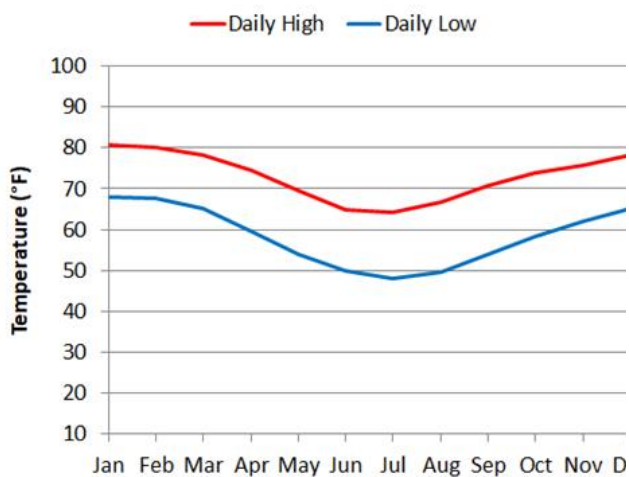
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Below is the climate you can expect for different regions in Australia:



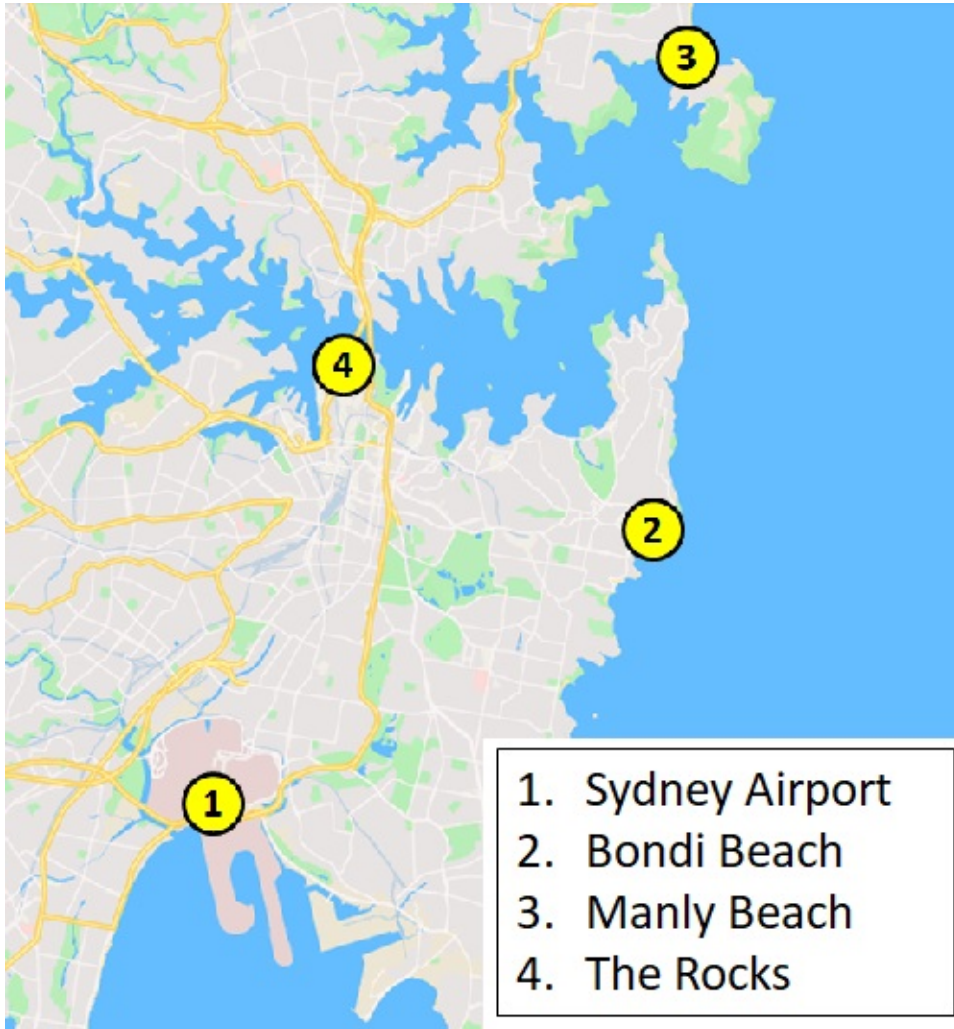
Climate in [Sydney](#)



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5.1 Getting from the airport ([map](#)) to your hotel

The airport lies about 5 miles (8km) outside the city. There are different ways to get from the airport to your hotel.



5.1.1 Taxi

You can find taxi stops outside the terminals. A ride to downtown will take about 20min and cost AU\$45-55. It can be significantly longer and more expensive during rush hour traffic. For updated information on taxi fares and taxi companies check this link:

<https://www.sydneyairport.com.au/info-sheet/by-taxi-and-rideshare>

5.1.2 Rideshare services Uber and Ola

Uber and Ola service the Sydney airport. Be aware that calling your ride via the uber or ola app is easy as there is free wifi in the airport (connect to “Free SYD Wifi”). Once you leave the terminal there is no wifi anymore and you may have problems seeing when your driver arrives unless you have a local SIM card or global data plan.

Here is a link to the uber fare estimator:

<https://www.uber.com/us/en/price-estimate/>

Here is a link to the Ola website from where you can get their app:

<https://ola.com.au/>

5.1.3 Train

The Airport Link train brings you to Central station in 13min for under AU\$20 per person. You will need to purchase an Opal card first before you can use the train. The Opal card is available at the train station in the airport.

To get to the train station, follow the “trains” sign in the Arrivals area after you get out of the secure area.

- International Terminal 1: After you exit the secure arrivals hall, turn right and walk for about 500ft (150m). The station entrance is past the McDonalds Restaurant.
- Domestic Terminal 2: The station entrance is near Virgin Airlines Baggage Carousel 2.
- Domestic Terminal 3: The station entrance is near Qantas Airlines Baggage Carousel 1.

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The airport stations in the domestic and international terminals are connected to green line T8. Here are useful links:

- Airport Link website: <https://www.airportlink.com.au/>
- Timetables: <https://www.airportlink.com.au/trip-information/time-tables/>
- Fare calculator: <https://transportnsw.info/>
- Network map: <https://www.airportlink.com.au/maps/network-map/>
- Opal card retailers: <https://transportnsw.info/opal-retailers#/>

5.1.4 Rental Car

In the arrivals area of the international terminal T1 are the rental car counters where you can rent a car or pick up the rental car you have reserved.

5.1.5 Bus

Sydney bus line 400 and 420 have bus stops outside terminals T1 and T3. You will need to purchase an Opal Card in advance inside the airport.

Here are useful links:

- Bus service website: <https://transportnsw.info/travel-info/ways-to-get-around/bus#/>
- Route 400 map: <https://transportnsw.info/routes/details/sydney-buses-network/400/31400>
- Route 420 map: <https://transportnsw.info/routes/details/sydney-buses-network/420/74420>

5.2 Sydney Harbour National Park - Gap Bluff ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#), [park brochure](#))

Started in 1975, Sydney Harbour National Park is 970 acre that consists of several noncontiguous parks in the Sydney and Port Jackson are:

- **Bradleys Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Clark Island ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Dobroyd Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Fort Denison ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Georges Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Goat Island ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Middle Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Nielsen Park ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Rodd Island ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Shark Island ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Quarantine Station at North Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **The Gap Bluff at South Head ([map](#), [reviews](#))**
- **Waterway between North Head ([map](#)) and Dobroyd Head ([map](#))**

You can't go wrong visiting either part of the park. We opted for The Gap for its easy walking trail – after all, we were exhausted from the long flight –the spectacular views of the cliffs and Tasman Sea and for its proximity to [Bondi Beach](#) ([map](#)) where we planned to relax from the long flight.

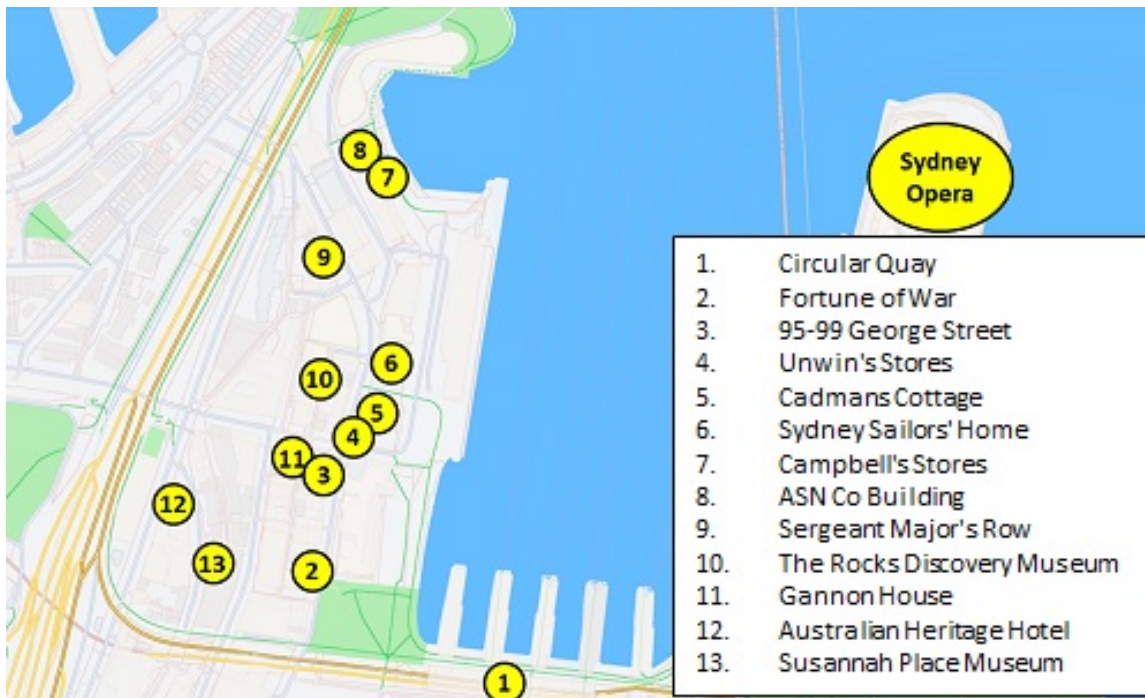
The Gap is an ocean cliff made of Sydney sandstone, which is a very porous yellow-brown stone. It became part of Sydney Harbour National Park in 1982 and is open to the public since 1990.

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5.4 The Rocks – Self Guided Walking Tour



5.4.1 Circular Quay ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Start your first full day at Circular Quay. You can get here by rental car, uber or taxi or you can take the subway, train or the red route of the Sydney BigBus Sightseeing Bus ([website](#)).

Circular Quay is frequently called the "Gateway to Sydney" as it has a cruise ship dock, docks for ferries and sightseeing ships, connection to the rail and bus system, parks, walking paths, pedestrian malls, restaurants and wonderful views of Sydney's Harbour Bridge and Opera House. It is also a good location to see Sydney's spectacular New Year's Eve fireworks.

With so much to offer, this is a popular tourist spot and probably the best point to start the first full day of your Australia dream vacation.

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Public and private ferries to many destinations in the Sydney are operate from here, including Manly, Taronga Zoo, Masman Bay, Sydney Olympic Park. Payment is by Opal card or a contact less credit card.

- Website and time tables: <https://transportnsw.info/routes/ferry>
- Public ferry network map: <https://transportnsw.info/document/2382/sydney-ferries-network-map-1017.pdf>

5.4.1.1 Harbor Cruise ([reviews1](#), [reviews2](#))

End your first full day in Sydney with a harbor cruise. After walking so much all day, enjoy the relaxed atmosphere on a Sydney harbor cruise from which you can marvel at the blue waters, Sydney's magnificent skyline and a wonderful sunset while enjoying dinner.

There are multiple providers, and types of cruises. Here are two sites that can help you find the cruise you like best:

- <https://www.sydney-harbour-cruises.com/>
- <https://www.viator.com/Sydney-attractions/Sydney-Harbour/d357-a284>

5.4.2 Fortune of War ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Address: 137 George Street

The Fortune of War was built on the site of Sydney's first hospital in 1828 by former convict Samuel Terry as a Public House. The first licensee was John Boreham who received a license to sell wines, malt and liquor in 1830. That makes it Sydney's oldest still operating pub. Samuel Terry was a successful businessman who was later known as the "Botany Bay Rothschild". At the time of his death in 1838, his estate was worth £250,000 with "land and property which defies assessment". The building was rebuilt in 1921/1922 by the Tooth & Co, which had brewing operations in Sydney since 1835.

Over time, The Fortune of War became popular as the "first and last stop ashore" for sailors and the Australian navy.

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The building is a three-story face brick building with stucco detailing. In the back is a traditionally looking modern addition. Facing George Street, you can see the original wall tiles, face brickwork, trim, and terrazzo thresholds. The interior layout of the public areas, including wall tiles and ceilings are likely original to the 1922 addition.



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5.4.10 The Rocks Discovery Museum ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Address: Kendall Ln

The Rocks Discovery Museum is housed in a restored 1850s sandstone warehouse and all about the history of The Rocks. Besides historical images and archaeological artefacts that were found in this area, it also has interactive and fun audio and visual exhibits that bring the history of this area to life.

The museum has permanent exhibitions of the four major areas impacting The Rocks:

- Warrane (pre-1788)
- Colony (1788–1820)
- Port (1820–1900)
- Transformations (1900–present)

Admission is free.



5.4.11 Gannon House ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Address: 45-47 Argyle Street

Built in 1839/1840 as a residential houses and stables by Michael Gannon, it now houses an art gallery and a café.

The depression of the 1840s bankrupted Gannon and his belongings seized and auctioned off in 1845. In 1858, house number 45 was a boarding house, and number 47 was inhabited by a bootmaker. In 1860, the land changed hands and by 1865, the workshops and stables that Gannon had constructed were gone and the residential property was enlarged.

The Gannon house is an example for a more low-cost development. This two-story Colonial Georgian style building has a ground floor made of stone and a first floor made of brick construction.

The Australian art gallery inside the Gannon House focuses on collectable indigenous art from the Northern Territory and houses one of the largest and unique collections of Aboriginal art in Australia. Many of the exhibits come from artists who are internationally recognized.



Gannon House obliges to the Indigenous Art Code, which is a commitment to the ethical purchase of indigenous art. Every artwork purchase comes with a certificate of authenticity and an information about the artist and their work.

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- The roof is decked with 1,056,006 tiles in two colors (glossy white and matte cream tiled). Look closer and you will see that the tiles form a striped pattern.
- Other exterior materials are: glass and pink granite from Tarana, Australia
- Comment of the jury that selected Jørn Utzon's design: *"The drawings submitted for this scheme are simple to the point of being diagrammatic. Nevertheless, as we have returned again and again to the study of these drawings, we are convinced that they present a concept of an Opera House which is capable of becoming one of the great buildings of the world."*



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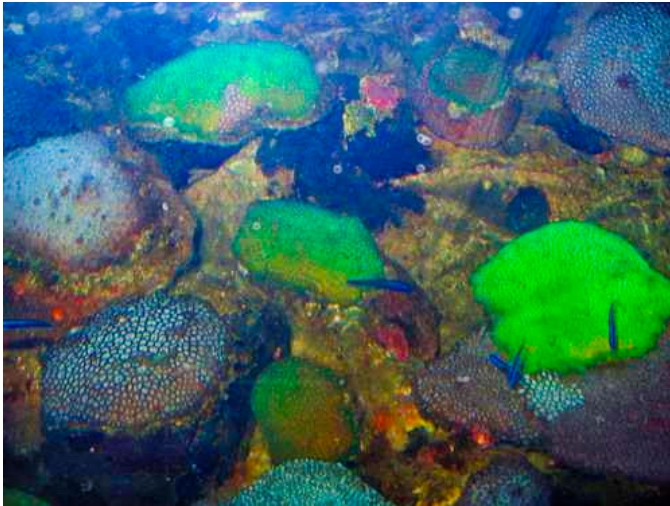
5.9 Sydney Tower Eye ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Opened to the public in 1981, the Sydney Tower is the tallest structure and the second tallest observation tower in the Southern Hemisphere. Its total height is 1,014ft (309m) or 1,073ft (327m) above sea level. The observation deck is located at an elevation of 915ft (279m) and the open air glass floor Skywalk platform that encircled the Tower is 879ft (268m).

At full speed, the high speed elevators take 45s to reach the observation deck. Instead of using the elevator, every year people race up the 1,504 stairs from Pitt Street Mall to the Observation Deck to raise money for the Cancer Council.



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5.12 Chinese Garden of Friendship ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

The Chinese Garden of Friendship is a 3 acre (1ha) Chinese garden that was designed by Sydney's sister city Guangzhou, China and modelled after the classic private gardens of the Ming Dynasty. It was opened in 1988 for Sydney's Bicentennial Celebrations.

Originally, this site was under water and, starting in 1850, it was slowly filled in and used for industrial purposes like ship building and repairs, workshops, metal foundries and food milling factories.

All plants in the Chinese Garden of Friendship were sourced in New South Wales. The two lychee trees were planted by visiting governors of the Chinese Guangdong province in 2009 and 2015. Lychee was chosen as it is one of the four great fruits of Lingnan region (together with banana, paw paw and pineapple) of which Guangdong is a part of.



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Over its history, the QVB had been neglected many times and barely escaped demolition many times. Fortunately, in 1971, the decision was made to preserve the building and to restore it to its former glory. This was done and the building reopened in late 1986 just in time for the busy Christmas shopping season.

Enjoy shopping on four levels inside the QVB!



6. Featherdale Wildlife Park ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Opened in 1972 on a former poultry farm, the 7 acre Featherdale Wildlife Park is a major tourist attraction just outside Sydney.

Featherdale focuses exclusively on native Australian animals of which it houses over 2,000 from more than 260 different species. This makes it the world's largest exhibition of Australian wildlife. There are 3 open space enclosures where visitors will encounter kangaroos, koalas, wallabies and many other native species.

You can either get there by car or take the T1 “North Shore & Western Line” light rail train ([website](#)). It takes 45min from the Town Hall station in central Sydney to the Blacktown Station. From there it is a 10min bus ride on bus line 729 which departs bus stand E which is located just outside the station to get to the entrance of the Featherdale Wildlife Park.

The park is open year-round, except on Christmas Day, from 9am to 4pm.

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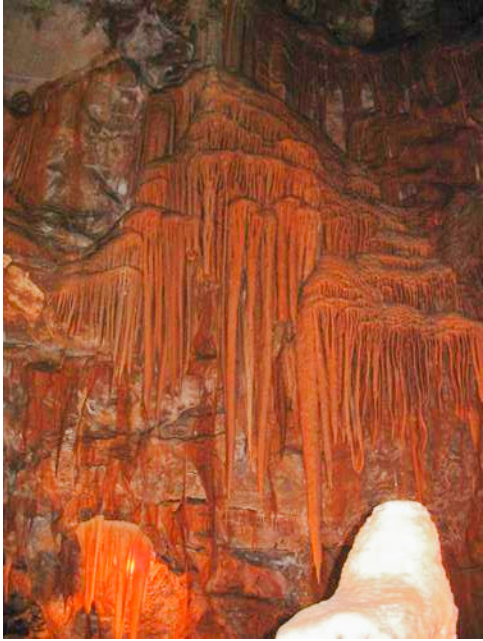
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Main tourist attractions in the Blue Mountains:

- [The Three Sisters](#) near Katoomba: one of Australia's most-photographed landmarks
- The **Giant Stairway walking track** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#)) near Katoomba: 998 stairs down a cliff into the Jamison Valley
- [Jenolan Caves](#) near Katoomba: a series of limestone caves
- **Scenic World**: Home of the Katoomba Scenic Railway, Scenic Skyway, Scenic Cableway and Scenic Walkway. **Katoomba Scenic Railway** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#)): the steepest cable-driven funicular railway in the world; 454 yards (415m) long with a maximum incline of 52 degrees.
- The **Zig Zag Railway** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#)) near Lithgow: a steam-powered railway
- **Red Hands Cave** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#)) near Glenbrook: Aboriginal art
- **Lincoln's Rock** ([map](#), [reviews](#)) in Wentworth Falls: spectacular views of the Jamison Valley



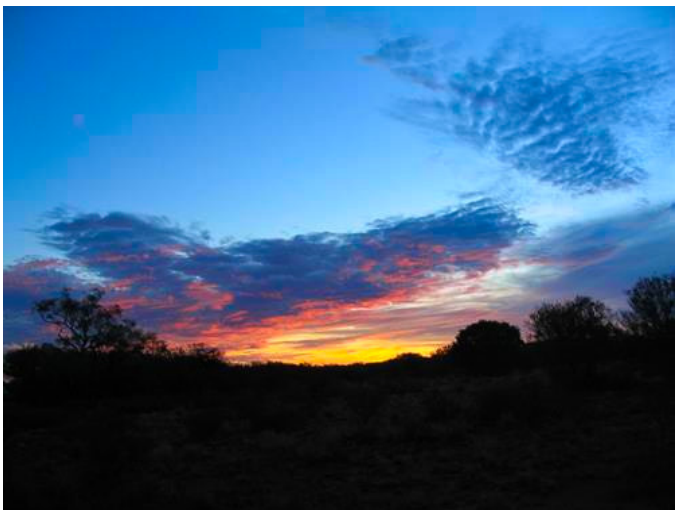
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Local Aboriginals recognize five seasons:

- Wanitjungkupai (April & May): Cooler weather
- Wari (June & July): Cold season that brings morning frosts
- Piri yakutu (August through October): Food plants flower and animals breed and
- Mai Wiyaringkupai (November & December): Hot season when food becomes scarce
- Itjanu (January through March): Sporadic storms that can occur suddenly

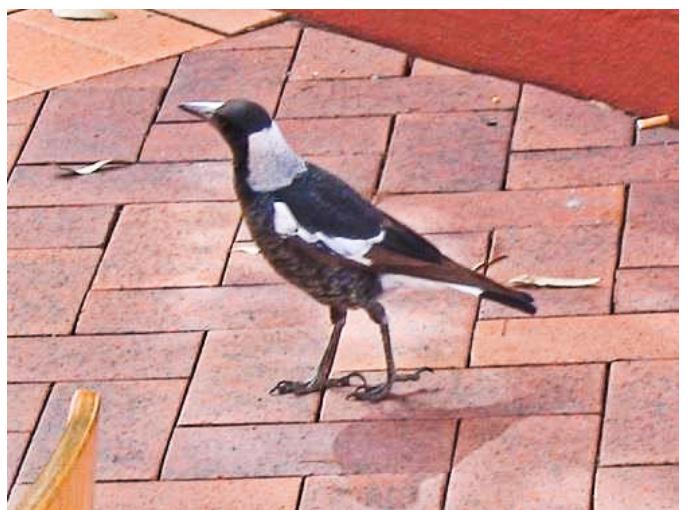
We visited Uluru for sunrise. As you can see from the photos below, it was a magical experience when Uluru started glowing after the first rays of light hit it while the surrounding desert was still dark.

Uluru has several hiking paths:

- Mala walk: easy walk to Kantju Gorge; 2km round trip; approx. 1.5h
- Kuniya walk: easy walk to Muṯitjulu Waterhole; 1km round trip; approx. 30 – 45min
- Lungkaṯa walk: easy walk, 4km round trip; approx. 1.5h
- Liru walk: easy walk, 4km round trip; approx. 1.5h
- Dune walk: easy but sandy walk; 600m round trip; approx. 30-45min
- Uluru Base walk: moderate walk; 10.6km round trip; approx. 3.5 hours

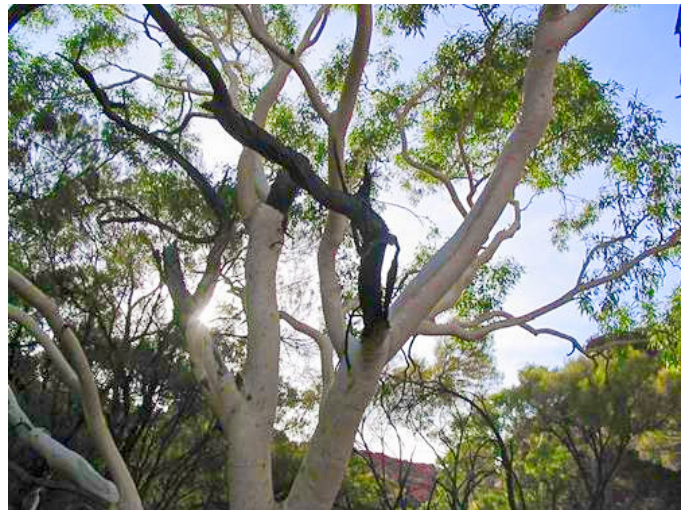
Even if you don't want to hike in the heat, consider joining a free ranger led Mala Walk where you will see rock paintings (see the photos below) – it will be worth your time.

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The Kings Canyon Rim hike is probably the most popular hike, but we decided for the Kings Creek Walk which is an easy 1 ¼ mile (2km) round trip hike which takes about 1h. This hike meanders along Kings Creek between the steep canyon walls and ends at a viewing platform from where you have fantastic views of the up to 100m tall canyon walls. Part of the canyon is a sacred Aboriginal site and visitors are asked to stay on the marked trail.



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8.5.1 Pyndan Camel Tracks Alice Springs ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

During the 19th century, dromedaries were brought Australia from British India and Afghanistan as a means of transportation that was perfectly adapted desert climates. In the early 20th century, motorized transportation replaced the need for camels and many were released in the wild. Because of their perfect adaption to desert climates, a thriving feral camel population developed. This was the largest feral camel population in the world. In 2008 it was estimated that the population had grown to about one million and was projected to double 8 - 10 years later, causing widespread damage to the fragile Australian outback. In 2009 a management program was established that reduced the feral camel population to about 300,000 in 2013. Today, camels are being used in Australia for their meat, milk, camel racing and recreational camel riding.

Pyndan Camel Tracks Alice Springs offers 2h guided camel rides that we enjoyed a lot.



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9.1.1 Cairns Esplanade ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

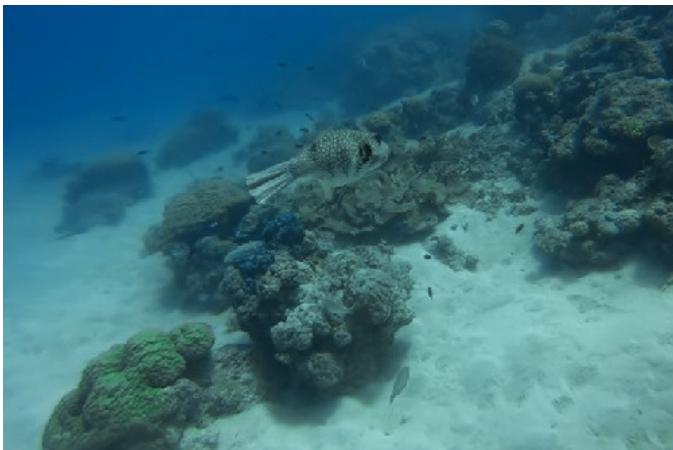
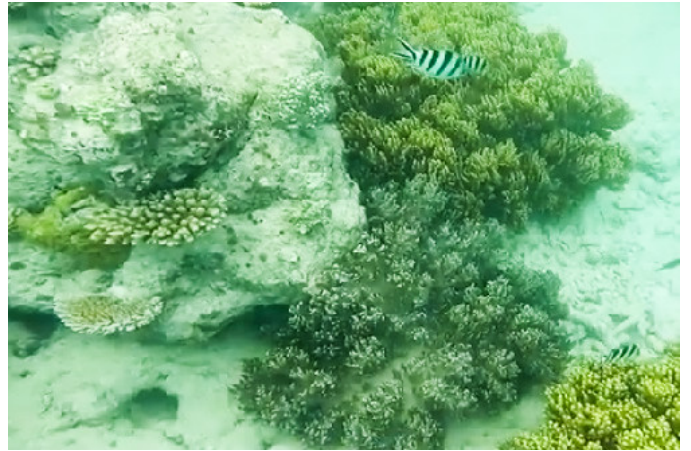
From the hotel it was only a short walk to the seaside and the Cairns Esplanade Boardwalk. The boardwalk is beautifully developed 2.5km stretch of landscaped parklands and lush lawns along Cairns' palm-fringed waterfront. It has a lagoon, playgrounds, barbeques and recreational facilities which are available for free public use.

Most importantly: There is absolutely no swimming in the ocean in Cairns due to crocodiles, poisonous jellyfish and other hostile sea creatures in the water!

Instead, enjoy watching the ocean or, during low tide, observing the sea floor and all the critters that are living on it from the boardwalk.



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9.3 Kuranda ([map](#))

We decided to take a day tour to Kuranda and then take the Kuranda Scenic Railway – one of the most scenic railways in the world – back to Cairns. The **Cairns Central Terminus** ([map](#), [website](#)) was only a few blocks from our hotel. From there we took bus 850 ([timetable](#)) towards Atherton, which stops in Kuranda after a 40min ride at Therwine St near Coondoo St ([map](#)). Alternatively, you can take bus 851 which needs 50min and ends at Therwine St near Coondoo St ([timetable](#)).

Kuranda is a small rural town with a population of about 3,000 people that caters to hordes of tourists that arrive mostly from nearby Cairns. It is located in an important wildlife corridor between the Daintree Tableland to the north and the Atherton Tableland in the south. Bordering Kuranda are the Kuranda National Park and the Barron Gorge National Park which are part the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Kuranda is also where the Barron River begins its steep descent to its coastal floodplains.

The main attractions in Kuranda are:

- Barron Falls Lookout at **Barron Gorge National Park** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))
- Birdworld ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))
- [Australian Butterfly Sanctuary](#)
- Jumrum Creek Conservation Park ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))
- Kuranda Arts Cooperative Gallery – currently closed due to relocation ([reviews](#), [website](#))
- Kuranda Koala Gardens ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))
- Kuranda Heritage Markets ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

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9.3.2 Kuranda Scenic Railway ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

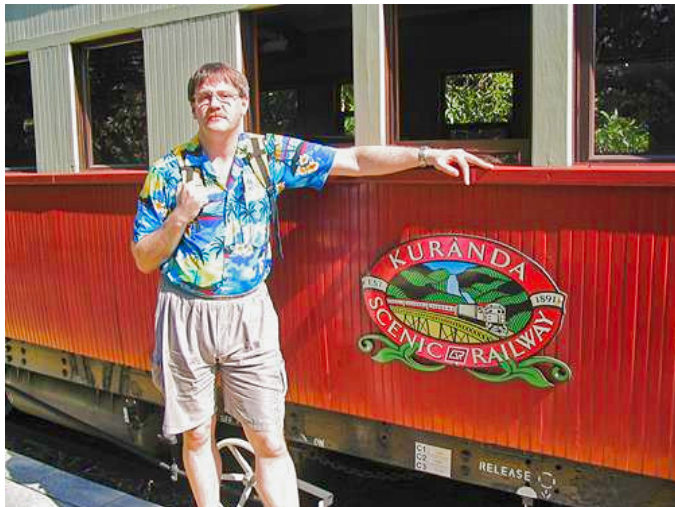
Construction of the 23 mile (37km) railway started 1886 in Cairns and reached Kuranda in 1891. During that time, 37 bridges and 15 tunnels were built. The railway was always used as a passenger service, but it took until 1936 when the first tourist train started operating on this line.

It takes a little under 2h for the train to climb/descend the 328m height difference. The train passes one of Kuranda's highlights, the magnificent Barron Falls, and several smaller waterfalls, including Stoney Creek Falls.

The carriages are designed to look like the original coaches from last century. Passengers can choose to ride in either of the following two classes:

Gold Class: This is the “premium” class with upholstered comfortable seats; refreshments and finger food are served

Heritage Class: This is the “lower” class in very rustic carriages with red leather seats and beautiful the woodwork.



9.4 Daintree National Park and Cape Tribulation Tour ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#), [park map](#))

Daintree National Park was founded in 1981 and became a World Heritage Site in 1988 because of its exceptional biodiversity. The southern and larger part of the park is called the “Mossman Gorge section” while the northern part is called the “Cape Tribulation section”. The name of the park comes from the Daintree River, which was named after pioneering Australian geologist and photographer Richard Daintree.

The Daintree Rainforest is likely the oldest continuously existing rainforest on the planet. It is estimated that it is more than 110 million years old.

The park houses more than 430 bird species, several rare mammals, at least 23 reptile and 13 amphibian species.

Most importantly: There is absolutely no swimming in the ocean due to crocodiles, poisonous jellyfish and other hostile sea creatures in the water!

There are multiple companies offering day trips to Daintree, but you can self-drive if you like.

The drive from Cairns to the Mossman Gorge Centre ([map](#)) was about 1h 15min.

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The next stop is the **Mount Alexandra Lookout** ([map](#), [reviews](#)).



The last stop is the **Kulki Boardwalk** ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#)) that leads to **Cape Tribulation Beach** ([map](#), [reviews](#)). Alternatively, you can take **Myall Beach track** or **Dubuji Boardwalk** ([map](#)) to **Myall Beach** ([map](#)).





10 Closing Remarks

ABOUT RUDY FROM BACKPACK & SNORKEL

I was born in Germany and emigrated to the US in 2003. My wife and I are a truly multinational couple: I, with my German background, and she with her Chinese heritage. Both of us live in the USA.

Sadly, working in the US means we have much fewer vacation days compared to other countries like e.g. Germany and thus we cannot travel very frequently.

Through a lot of trial and error, we have found our ideal travel and vacation style. **Making Memorable Moments** by focusing on important destinations, planning time for meeting the locals and, of course, for relaxation are our priorities.

We have also learned to appreciate local foods and try to eat as many local dishes as possible. Just for fun, we try to eat at one Chinese restaurant in each country we visit. It is absolutely amazing how different Chinese food is all over the planet.



MAKING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

You may take 10,000 photos during your vacation, rush from one attraction to the next, but what you will remember in your heart is how you were **Making Memorable Moments**.

For me, that was e.g. Spider Rock in Canyon de Chelly (ever heard of this US National Park?). When I first saw it, I was blown away by this majestic natural obelisk and the beautiful canyon that it sits in. I have been there two more times and still feel the same.

Or think of Isla Mujeres, a small island outside Cancun, Mexico. On the surface, Playa Norte is supposedly Mexico's most beautiful beach and it is always crowded and the boats that anchor there play loud music. Below the surface, Isla Mujeres is very relaxed, quite walkable and it has friendly locals, good authentic Mexican food and good international cuisine and is often very affordable.

Isla Mujeres is our personal paradise!



PACK YOUR BACKPACK & SNORKEL AND LET'S GO

Our travel style has evolved over the years. We are packing light these days when we travel and typically only need a small backpack per person - see my [Traveling Light Guide](#).

With this guide, I want to provide value to you and help you plan your own relaxing vacations with the goal of **Making Memorable Moments!**

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments.