



A Season of Happiness

nothing too serious

Popcorn



P07-2



A Visitor's Guide to the Real Australia – part 2

Contrary to popular misconceptions, roos aren't often seen bounding down Australian streets; and we don't all have corks dangling from our Akubras to keep the flies off. There are usually plenty of those around, flies that is - the nuisance variety, bush flies, March flies, dunny-budgies, etc - so visitors need to perfect the Australian wave, a frequent flap of the hand in front of the face during warmer weather; or a sprig of gum leaves will do a similar job. It's fairly hot much of the time, but although what you may have heard about the climate is probably true, it should be remembered that this is a big country encompassing the cooler regions down south to the tropics of the north. A single day's drive can take travellers from the misery of cold and wet to clear blue skies and sunshine. If you're in Melbourne, you may only need to stay a while, it having the dubious reputation of presenting four seasons in one day. Those intending to do The Lap can even follow the good stuff around the country and not see a skerrick of rain for their entire trip; and anyone prepared to seek them out will discover plenty of sights and places that dreams are made of.

There's a raft of companies offering the usual bus tours, and these are fine for limited stays when local knowledge can jam a lot into a little; but to really get the most out of Oz, you need to squiz the brochures just for ideas, then drive yourself. Hire cars are always available and they are undoubtedly the safe option, but they aren't cheap and it pays to read the fine print of the terms and conditions, especially before leaving the road for a bit of bush-bashing. Even four-wheel drives aren't necessarily covered for accidents and breakdowns once off the bitumen; and if you do get bogged, the cocky who drags you out with his tractor will be more concerned about his fee than any damage his chains might do to the vehicle. Once back on the highway, of course, it's left side of the road and clockwise on roundabouts; but there's a bit more to it than that. Although the basic road rules are the same wherever you go, there can be certain small differences between States. So get yourself a rule book for each of the States or Territories you intend driving in. Another thing you'd be advised to consider is taking fruit and vegies across the borders. There are restrictions on some produce to prevent the transmission of diseases and pests.

Those of a more adventurous nature might fancy taking a punt like the backpackers who actually buy a car. I have heard that there are car parks in the bigger cities, Sydney in particular, where real bargains can be purchased from visitors who have completed their stay. Just bear in mind that they probably bought the car at that very place a fair few months ago from someone else who'd done the same. Many

of these old bombs aren't worth a brass razoo and have been on the go so long that they could find their own way round the country if they had a mind to. Being already totally shot, however, they would happily fall to bits where they stood rather than risk carking it on some deserted highway in the middle of nowhere. Should this happen, there's no come-back for the current owner because the raw prawn who sold it to them will have already shot through and gone home.

Before heading off, there are a few things to consider. Obviously you'll need a map, but don't make the mistake of assuming every named dot along the road is a town where you can take a break and pick up supplies. Many do have some facilities, though, and you could be lucky enough to score a servo and a general store. The odd one is a sight to behold, seemingly stuck in the dark ages selling frozen bread and milk, clothing your grandparents used to wear, even sheep dip, cattle drench and horseshoes. There are, however, those marked locations which are a bit of a mystery. You'll see the sign declaring which place you are approaching; then, while you're looking around for a semblance of civilisation and finding none, a few metres along you'll notice the back of another sign facing the opposite direction; and if you glimpse it in passing, it will tell you where you've just left, not a postcard or T shirt in sight, and you've got Buckley's if you're desperate for fuel.

Distances in Australia are measured the same as anywhere, but locals and visitors alike tend to regard driving time as a better guide, especially when it comes to fuel and comfort breaks. You'll find most roadhouses on major highways marked on the map and it pays to work out the fuel consumption of your vehicle before giving a servo the flick because the prices seem too high - the next one could be another 200 K's further on and might be even more expensive. Costs in remote areas are generally high reflecting supply difficulties; some retailers, unfortunately, take advantage of this and charge like wounded bulls. Unless you have a huge fuel tank, there's not much you can do but cop it sweet. Hire vehicles are usually reliable and come with roadside-assist insurance, which is fine around town; but if you break down on a country road, be prepared to wait a while for the RAC-man. Some roadhouses and small-town servos often have workshops and may condescend to do the odd repair, but don't bank on it.

Water, particularly the drinking kind, won't always be available, so it is essential to carry some, whether driving or walking. It is also a good idea to tell someone where you are going and what time you estimate either returning, or hope to arrive at another destination. Some National Parks have a visitor's book for recording such information. Failing that, there could be a Ranger station nearby, or a cop-shop in town, assuming there is a town. This really does matter when going bush, definitely on walkabout. Even the most experienced fall foul of their own self-confidence sometimes. It's so easy to become disorientated in places where there are no visible landmarks and everything looks the same. If your vehicle does become stranded, stay close - it will provide shelter and is easier for rescue teams to spot than a person on foot. If you thought to buy an EPIRB before setting out, you'll get picked up a lot quicker.

Wherever you go in the great outdoors of Australia, remember to slip-slop-slap: that means slip on a shirt, slop on sun screen and slap on a hat. No-one will think you a wooz, because we all do it. Avoid taking your lead from those bronzed galahs cooking on the beach - they seem to forget that this is the skin-cancer capital of the world; and if they don't cop the big C, they'll wind up looking like dried prunes before they hit fifty! Plus, to drive off those pesky flies and mozzies, use a good brand of insect repellent like Aerogard containing DEET and you'll be able to keep on keeping on.

I hope all of this hasn't put you off coming. As a rule, we are fairly civilised, although we may quite possibly have a lend of you because we enjoy a good laugh; but this will be with the best of intentions and shouldn't be taken seriously. We don't take kindly to those mongrels who upset or rip-off our visitors - that would be considered very un-Australian. We really would like to see you and, above all, want you to have the time of your life, maybe even come back for a second serve.

Colloquialisms used in the above text:

Akubra: the brand name of a popular wide-brimmed hat made known internationally by golfer, Greg Norman. Also frequently used to describe any other make of a similar style.

Australian wave: a sideways flapping of the hand in front of the face to ward off flies.

Bogged: usually referring to a vehicle stuck in soft sand or mud. Also applied to people inundated with work or problems (bogged down by work).

(old) Bomb: a vehicle well past its use-by date and extremely unreliable.

Brass razoo: made from cheap metal and not even a coin of the realm, it is consequently worthless. Anything said to be "not worth a brass razoo" is of no value and something only a mug would buy.

Buckley's (chance): most unlikely to succeed or eventuate. I'm not sure who Buckley was, but he would seem to have been a very unlucky person!

(going) Bush: (getting) away from habitation and into areas of native flora, forests, etc. Can also be used to describe someone forsaking civilisation to live alone in such places.

Bush-bashing: driving off-road and through bushland where there are no established tracks, usually to the detriment of the flora and the general environment. It is a popular pastime, yet understandably frowned on by many Australians.

Bush flies: not to be confused with ordinary flies which are simply a pest. Bush flies are about the same size, sometimes identifiable by their striped marking, and you'll know one's around when it bites! They are more common out of town and have an annoying habit of frequenting roadside pull-ins where they wait unseen until the car door is opened. Treat any bite with antiseptic cream or lotion and seek medical advice if it causes an allergic reaction.

Cark it: die, give up the ghost.

(to) Charge like a wounded bull: charge an exorbitant fee or amount, overcharge, rip-off.

Cocky: a farmer. Also any type of cockatoo.

Cop it sweet: accept what has occurred, take it on the chin, just forget about it and move on.

Cop-shop: police station, lock-up. Not every town has one and the really remote regions are serviced by those in the more populated areas. An emergency call (000) will ensure assistance, but it could take some time before anyone reaches the scene.

DEET: Diethyl-meta-toluamide, a highly effective insect repellent developed by the US Army for the protection of personnel engaged in jungle warfare. Mozzies hate the smell which masks the perspiration and breath of their victims - that's how they usually find you!

Dunny-budgies: a dunny is an outside toilet and the flies that hang around are often the coloured, iridescent ones known as bluebottles in the UK. Ours are usually green, like the native budgerigar.

EPIRB: a personal emergency beacon. When activated, it sends a signal to a monitoring service which is able to pin-point the exact location of the device.

(the) Flick: to give someone/something the flick is to instantly dismiss, usually because they/it are deemed unnecessary, irrelevant, or simply a pain.

Galah: idiot, clown, silly or stupid person. Also a pink-and-grey cockatoo.

Have a lend (of): play a joke on, take the rise/mickey out of, trick or fool.

March flies: much larger than ordinary or bush flies, these are about the size of blow-flies (blowies), but they are much slower buzzing around, and they bite! Fortunately, as the name implies, they are usually only around for that month.

Mongrel: a person of questionable character with little or no integrity. Can be applied to inanimate objects that refuse to behave as they should. Also an animal, particularly a dog, of mixed lineage.

Mozzie(s): mosquitoes. Especially in the tropics, some of these carry disease and should be regarded as a serious health risk. Loose-fitting clothes such as long-sleeved shirts and full-length trousers are advisable. Also a good insect repellent containing DEET - cheaper versions without this chemical aren't necessarily effective. Even down south it is best to check with the locals because mozzies in some areas can inflict Ross River and Barmah Forest viruses.

Oz: Australia.

Punt: derives from the long kick in football, particularly Aussie Rules and Gridiron. Because the ball is in the air so long, which side gets it can't be guaranteed. In everyday terms, a punt is a long shot, a bit of a chance, a risk, a gamble.

The Lap: traditionally, the main highways taking travellers right around the country. Doing The Lap is still the favourite occupation of retirees; and although costs of fuel and site fees have become expensive, these Grey Nomads drive on, towing their caravans and making the most of Oz while spending their children's inheritance.

RAC-man: the agent of the Royal Automobile Club, and roadside-assist mechanic. Different States have their own independent organisation, but generally offer reciprocal arrangements for members on tour. Anyone driving themselves for extended periods would be wise to join.

Raft (of): a lot, plentiful, a host, a considerable amount.

Raw prawn: a cheat or swindler. A person who thinks only of themselves at the expense of others, particularly friends. One who goes back on their word, or does the dirty on someone.

Ranger station: the base from which a Park Ranger operates, often incorporating his or her accommodation. Larger parks may also have tourist information centres and souvenir shops. Staff and/or the Ranger will be happy to advise on places of interest in the area, plus any local hazards to be avoided and road closures that might be a problem.

Roadhouse: in Australia, these are more than simple fuel stops. Because of the great distances between populated areas, roadhouses generally offer restaurant or cafe meals and take-away snacks. Some have motel-style accommodation and even camping facilities. Parking areas are usually expansive to cater for trucks and road-trains (prime-movers hauling a number of trailers), so leave your car in a spot where it isn't going to get crunched!

Roo: a kangaroo of any size or colour. Also **Big Red, Boomer**. When driving, be on the lookout for them at dawn and dusk; and anytime after a fall of rain when they could be drinking from puddles on the road. If you do hit one that doesn't bound off, check the pouch for a Joey (a baby or youngster) and enquire locally where you can take it for care - left on its own, it will die. Also, be careful not to approach any roo in the wild - they can attack and the result can be fatal.

Score: acquire, happen on by chance, win.

Servo: service/petrol station, fuel stop. Even the smaller ones can have limited food supplies and motoring odds and ends. Some may offer workshop repairs for basic problems and punctures; but spare parts in remote areas would have to be ordered in and this will usually mean a long wait.

Shot: beyond repair, on its last legs, knackered, stuffed.

Shot through/shoot through: applied to a person who disappears or leaves, usually without notice, often without paying, sometimes taking what they are not entitled to.

Skerrick: a very small amount, minuscule, a smidgen, so small it is hardly noticeable.

Squiz: an enquiring look or glimpse which can be short or long, especially to gain some special or required knowledge.

Un-Australian: mateship and the desire to help anyone from friend to stranger, especially during hard times, has become a way of life; to ignore this basic consideration would be something a decent Australian wouldn't dream of doing. Politically, it has come to mean any act or procedure that goes against what the majority of the population deem to be right and just.

Walkabout: an Aboriginal term describing the traditional act of walking into the bush, usually alone and often for long periods. This may be in search of relatives or a new place to dwell, but is frequently a spiritual time to bond with nature and discover one's true self, perhaps the meaning of *The Dreamtime* and life itself. Popular modern usage of the word can mean simply going on the wander, generally without telling anyone.

Wooz: a coward, softy, wimp, or a person unwilling to take chances.

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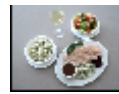
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