



A Season of Happiness

nothing too serious

Popcorn



P07-3



The Traveller's Guide to the Real Australia 3

As a holiday destination, Australia has it all - beautiful weather, as long as you pick the right time and place; sandy beaches lapped by crystal-clear seas; everything from snow-capped mountains (in winter, of course) to tropical rain-forests anytime. Mind you, it's big: I mean *really* big. Depending where you start from, a day's driving can get you to where you're going, or you might still be fronting another 1500 K's or more. For instance, Perth to Darwin is over 4000 K's, that's 2500 miles in old money and will probably take at least 48 hours behind the wheel. So anyone planning this particular trip would be best having two drivers who are happy to spend a week on the road, which can be boring. Sure there's stuff to see on the way, but it's likely to be pretty same-same much of the time. Once out of the civilised areas of small towns and farms, the landscape becomes remote; unspoilt, you might say. In actual fact, those sunburnt plains stretching to the horizon may appear like a wilderness and uninhabitable, but if the bitumen's lined with fences, and your treads rumble over the occasional cattle grid, you can bet your last quid it's just a small part of some station. Then there are the lumpy bits. These hilly regions, a lot of them in the eastern states, can have you winding up and down through lush forests - a veritable greenie's treat. If you're that way inclined it will please you no end; but it can be slow going; and any kids along for the ride will step up the whingeing and their obligatory: "Are we there yet?" routine. As for the driver: glancing down the steep drop just inches from their wheels to see a car that didn't make the bend and is now propping up a tree, that can be a mite disconcerting! I'm not trying to put visitors off, just making it clear that the inviting scenes shown in glossy travel brochures do exist, and most will be all that vacationers could wish for; but they have to get there first.

When time matters, it's good to have some idea of where to go and what's on offer. Backpackers taking a year to fruit-pick their way round the country can do it bit by bit. To start with anyway, they'll pitch their pup tent in a caravan park until they find work on a farm, some of which provide limited camping facilities, sometimes for free. That's not a bad lurk because the work doesn't pay a fortune and park fees aren't cheap; and after a day of hard yakka, hitching a ride back to the campsite can be a pain. All they'll want is to grab some tucker and fall straight into their swags. There's a point here that many don't realise - days can be hot, especially in the height of summer; but after sundown it can drop below zero for a real two-dog night.

Those who can't spare much more than a fortnight, or simply want to veg, will most likely pick a comfortable base that has a selection of touristy spots within easy reach. Deciding on the right pozzie depends on what you want to experience, presumably something different from home. Aussies love the sea and anything they can do in it or on it, so city-dwellers might fancy giving the coast a burl. Apart from swimming there's surfing, surf-skiing, jet-skiing, boogie boarding, sail-boarding, para-sailing, ordinary sail-boat sailing, and that blokey pastime fishing - for this you'd need a mate with tinny, an Eskyful of tinnies, and a believable yarn you can hang on the missus when you get home late and legless! You can do most

of these from anywhere - as long as there's a good pond of water and a way to get into it. Don't be too worried about that bit of news of late which reckons sharks are on a feeding frenzy, people being high on the menu. Well, it's sort-of true, no denying; but hey, if a person's dill enough to swan around outside the flags in fish country, they've got to figure on losing a leg or two, don't they? But, that's not you, eh?

Or maybe it is; and if you're up for a bit of adventure, Steve Irwin style, there's the Top End just waiting for you. There are guided tours a-plenty that will ferry you to places where you can scrape skin off your hands and knees climbing up and down magnificent gorges; take snaps of stunning landscapes to show everyone back home what it looked like where you got lost for a week and had to be rescued by the SES; or you might fancy a chopper ride over inaccessible country that hasn't changed for millions of years. Anyone who likes to get back to nature can book on an off-road bush-safari. Most are well organised, although I've heard of the odd one that turned out rough as guts and the management was very reluctant to give refunds to dissatisfied customers. Then, of course, you can choose to drive yourself. Just remember the value of getting some local knowledge first – it can be a life-saver; and definitely take any warning signs seriously. Like the ones about not swimming with crocs. That applies to anywhere in or near (even on land, crocs can run faster than you!) rivers, creeks, billabongs and the sea - our crocs are salties, but they don't mind a bit of fresh. Rivers up north are great for barra which are a treat on the barby; but standing waist-deep in water to fish for them isn't too smart – crocs love eating them too, plus anything or anyone else they happen on in the vicinity that can be chomped and rolled. If you want to get up close and personal with these prehistoric beasts, do it in a wildlife park from the other side of the fence. Try to match a croc on his own turf and he'll be the one with the toothy smile. So, when it's real steamy hot and you'd kill for a dip, jump into one of the pools of the swanky hotels. The only thing likely to bite there is the drinks bill at the end of your stay.

On the more sophisticated side, wine buffs are well catered for in most states. You can get the wood on where to go from information centres, or maybe the local bottle shop. If an area is suitable for growing grapes, there'll be a few vineyards around, many of which have cellar-door sales where you can have a taste before you buy. Some even have restaurants, making a day's drive through the Adelaide hills or Victoria's Yarra Valley a very pleasant experience. But drivers be warned – there might be booze buses lurking, so if you don't want to get done for DD, stick to fruit juice, or book a tour and enjoy the plonk without the worry. Happy hunting.

Colloquialisms used in the above text:

backpacker: a traveller who moves from place to place, often by hitching rides, and carrying all their belongings in a backpack.

barby: barbecue, as in the item of cooking equipment; also used for the actual event or occasion – fancy a barby this arvo?

barra: barramundi, a predatory fresh water fish similar to a pike, prized as a tasty and very expensive restaurant dish.

beaut: beautiful, great, wonderful, excellent.

billabong: isolated waterhole, often in the bush, sometimes fed by a spring, or a nearby creek.

bitumen: any road sealed and surfaced with bitumen (tarmac).

blokey: appertaining to male-orientated things that women are unlikely to find entertaining; just for men.

booze bus: police van equipped to test drivers for alcohol consumption – and they do!

bottle shop: a shop that sells take-away liquor (UK: off-licence); can be a pub, but this is generally referred to as "over the bar".

burl: a try, a go, an attempt, usually at something that has not been experienced before.

cattle grid: a series of parallel steel tubes taking the place of bitumen and set across the road between stock fences. These are spaced sufficiently apart to ensure cattle, or any livestock, can't achieve a secure footing and are therefore deterred from using the road to cross into the next paddock or property.

chopper: helicopter, as if you didn't know, but if I left it out, some smartypants would have had a whinge!

croc: crocodile. There are guided boat tours to see and learn about these amazing creatures of the tropics. The East Alligator River is one such place, but the name was actually a misnomer, because there aren't any gators there!

DD: drink driving; driving under the influence of alcohol.

dill: idiot, clown, twit, someone who thinks little of consequences for their actions; also a herb.

Esky(ful): an insulated carry container or box used for keeping food and drinks cold. Although this is a brand name, "esky" is often used to describe a similar portable drinks container made by any other company.

flags: set up by the local lifesavers to indicate a section of beach that they are currently patrolling which is likely to be free of danger, especially rips that can whisk a swimmer out to sea in seconds, even Olympic ones! To swim outside the flags is both irresponsible and possibly suicidal.

fronting: front – to face, face-up to, confront, have to deal with.

greenie: alluding to someone who is passionate about the environment and the saving of it; also a politician from the Green Party.

hang on: tell to, inform, offer an explanation to (believable, hopefully).

K('s): Kilometre(s).

legless: intoxicated, inebriated, falling-down drunk.

lurk: idea, plan, thing to do, a bet.

mate: friend, buddy, well-known acquaintance.

missus: wife, partner, lady-friend, girlfriend.

mite: a small amount, tiny, a little bit. Australians, however, tend to joke around, so a mite could actually mean huge; also a very small insect, usually no bigger than a pin-head.

old money: probably originated after the change from sterling to decimal currency. Now not necessarily applied exclusively to money, but used to describe anything that is different from the traditionally accepted way or meaning.

plonk: any wine as opposed to spirit; a cheap wine, either bottled or from a cask (chateau cardboard).

pozzie: position or place, usually referring to a specific location, but can mean place as in class distinction – he'll be right, once he's found his pozzie.

pup (tent): a small dome-type tent sleeping two or three. Being made of nylon with fibreglass rods for support, these are lightweight and can easily be carried.

quid: the old pound (sterling), no longer legal tender. The word is still used to describe an amount of money of an unspecified value – I wouldn't do that for quids, meaning I wouldn't do that for anything; he's quids in, meaning he has a lot of money; also a derogatory reference to a person's diminished mental state – he's not the full quid.

roll(ed) - as with crocodile: this is the action crocs take after grabbing hold of their prey, twisting and rolling with it in the water, presumably to drown and disorientate; or maybe because they just like a roll with their lunch!

rough as guts: really basic, pretty awful; far from sophisticated, common, minus the trimmings.

salties: salt-water crocodiles.

same-same: exactly the same with little or no variation; repetitious to the extent that it is tedious or boring.

SES: the State Emergency Service.

station: a large urban or remote property running sheep or cattle; some can be a thousand or more square kilometres, but scarcity of feed per acre makes the size necessary.

Steve Irwin: late TV personality with an adventurous spirit who courted danger to bring up-close-and-personal footage to millions of viewers. Steve died tragically after being fatally stung by a stingray on one of his film shoots.

swag: a sleeping bag or roll, often with a hood, which is warm, hopefully waterproof and can be used on open ground without the cover of a tent; also describes a person's bedding such as an ordinary sleeping bag. During the depression of the 1930's, "swaggies" were often seen with their bedroll on their back, having left their families to wander the country in search of paid work.

swan (around): drift, wander, move around carelessly and with no apparent motivation or destination in mind.

swanky: classy, posh, expensive, upper-class.

tinnies: cans, usually of beer, but can refer to canned mixers such as bourbon and Coke.

tinny: a small aluminium boat or runabout.

Top End: the northern section of the Australian continent, mainly the tropics.

tread(s): tyre(s) as on a vehicle. Also used to describe a type of casual sandal made from old tyre treads; sometimes any form of footwear - "That's a flash pair of treads you've got."

tucker: food.

turf: area, locality, neighbourhood, vicinity, familiar ground.

two-dog night: an extremely cold night, when just having a single dog to keep one warm is not enough.

veg: [pronounced: vedge, as in sledge], shortened form of vegetate: to relax, chill out, laze around, do nothing, take it easy.

whingeing: whining or complaining; forever criticising.

(get the) wood (on): acquire information, learn about.

yakka: work, usually paid; also refers to anything that requires more than a little physical effort.

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