

Hello, Brisbane



Brisbane is in Queensland, though just barely (upper right on the map), which is the fastest growing part of Australia. It's the second

largest state, covers quite a large area, but even then only has 4 million people. Of these, 2 million live in Brisbane, so as a previous picture showed, there's lots of room for growing things and for free-ranging cattle. It's an attractive city located on the --- What else? --- Brisbane River. There's a bridge, which though impressive and built about the same time as the one in Sydney, pales in comparison. It does sport the same kind of pedestrian walkway (on the right in above pix) that snakes its way through the downtown area and the botanical garden. There's even a free-floating stretch, which skirts the bluffs north of the city --- not for those with weak stomachs.



There was also a variation of the swimming pool on the ocean, which we saw in Bondi. In this case, however, it was a beach/pool just steps from the river. It's very impressive what a little imagination can do. There are catamarans which ply the river and you can see one in the picture to the left.



We rented a fully furnished and outfitted apartment for the time we were there. It was a 10 minute walk downtown and just two blocks to a Woolworth's super market. The Lonely Planet guide described the place as having a "commodious courtyard". Cindy was unfamiliar with this well-known term. As a former English teacher, I needed to carefully and accurately explain just what this meant. So I summoned and applied linguistic analysis, contextual dissection and cultural interpretation to come up with the precise meaning. I told Cindy that the courtyard was full of commodes. At least that's what it means in Australia.

Surfer's Paradise – Are You Kidding me?



We found out that there is a place called Surfer's Paradise about 90 minutes to the southeast of Brisbane on the "Gold Coast". Surely this was a mythical place and not a real one, so we hopped a train to check this out for ourselves. Not only does it exist,

but it's quite substantial. It's kind of like the Fort Lauderdale of Australia. There are miles of beach, but if you want to live here it ain't going to be cheap. Things are expensive in Australia already and to live here would cost a premium. It's one of those great to visit, but you couldn't afford to live there places.



The beach was great, but the thing that caught my attention in the Lonely Planet and sparked my greatest interest was to see the Vomatron, "The ride the Astronauts feared". I think they may have spelled that wrong. Shouldn't it be the Vomitron? That distinction aside, neither of us were about to put our lunch at risk and so we hoped someone else would be more daring. Alas, no one took the challenge to be hurled around at 100 mph. There's a lot of g's, baby, 5 g's to be exact.

The Life of O'Reilley

Another side trip we took, was to a place called O'Reilley's. It is located in a rain forest in the Green Mountains about 2.5 hours by bus southwest of Brisbane. There is a game preserve and lodge near the top of one of the peaks. It was quite a climb for the bus, traversing old logging roads with switch backs and one way passage in many parts. There was even a traffic light at one point, but it was to control the flow of traffic

over one of the single lane stretches. By the time we made the ascent and descent, I thought we might have ridden the senior citizen version of the Vomatron after all.



O'Reilley's has a rather colorful past. Back in the 1930's, Bernard O'Reilley had established his lodge and was a well known naturalist and conservationist. The Stinson airplane, a tri-motor craft had just been introduced in Australia and flew between Brisbane and Sydney. One particular flight was overdue and was thought down along the coast. Unbeknown to the searches, the plane had actually taken an inland route over the moun-

tains, got caught in a treacherous rainstorm and crashed. Bernard learned of this and talked to some people who thought they heard the plane pass over head. He calculated the possible direction and set out himself through the rain forest to find the plane. After five days he located the wreckage and found two of the survivors. A third had survived the crash, but had died before being discovered. Bernard then hiked out of the area and lead searches back to the scene to rescue the other two. Quite a tale.



We were only at the lodge for a couple of hours and didn't have a chance to explore the many trails, but we did have a chance to walk on a bridge which straddled the jungle canopy about 25 yards above the ground. It's kind of neat and at one point, I was able to actually climb further up the tree to get a better view.



They also had some birds there and for a bird brain like myself it was a great chance to have some pictures taken.

Next time someone says, "Hey, there's a bird on your head", I'm going to take them more seriously. It may also have had something to do with being in any area where people could buy bird seed to feed them. Cindy was more conversant than I. Move over Dr. Dolittle.

With that we headed back to Sydney and concluded our Australian visit. Though we had to scale back our original plans, we covered a lot of ground and took in a lot along the way. We will certainly return to Australia again.

One last item worthy of note was on the flight back. As we approached the Vietnamese coast in the middle of the night, I looked out of the window and saw lights, not quite as numerous as the stars, but in great numbers, nonetheless. As I strained to figure out what they were, I could see they were ships, large and small anchored or perhaps fishing off the Vietnamese coast. It was an extraordinary sight. When the coastal cities of Viet Nam came into view I could easily identify the population centers, which shone brightly. It was a memorable moment, one not soon to be forgotten.