

Marco Men's Club Cruise to Australia & New Zealand ~ October 20-November 5, 2022

"The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly"

This trip, that we first booked in 2019, finally took place in 2022! Of all the trips we have taken with the Men's Club, this is by far the most screwed up! For months we received multitudes of emails from American Airlines, Celebrity, and Qantas, all saying conflicting things about our flights, our seats, COVID rules, luggage weights allowed. You must prove negative COVID test or not. You must wear masks or not. Everyone was losing patience. There was **far** too much debate about how heavy your carry-on bag could be with Qantas. We were not allowed to change our seats. But the morning of Thursday, October 20th finally came, and we took our COVID test early am to make sure we were negative before we boarded the bus to Miami. We both tested negative, so we could go.

Maureen came down from Massachusetts to stay at our house and take care of Tonya while we were away. She drove us to the Yacht Club where we boarded the bus. We waited for quite a long time and then the bus left with a few people missing. Pat Hagedorn and Billie Maine were two of them. They called Martha Ross to say that they were on their way and the bus driver actually stopped at the outlet stores on 951 and waited for them. Eddie was furious as we were all worried that we would not have enough time to get properly checked in.

We finally arrived at Miami International Airport, waited in a very long line, checked in, and boarded our first flight to LAX, which was 5.5 hours long. Supposedly our luggage was checked through to Sydney even though we were to change planes and airlines in LAX.

Prior to the trip, Eddie had purchased Apple Air Tag trackers with the app which allowed you to track your luggage. While waiting at LAX, my app said that my checked bag was 2,143 miles away, so I thought that it never left Miami. Eddie's app said that his bag was at LAX. Since Eddie and I had crossed packed and had enough clothes in our carry-ons to last 3 days, we figured we would be alright without my big bag. While we were on the next flight, I checked my app again and it then said that my bag was with me! We relaxed then and assumed that everything was going to be alright.

The flight to Sydney was very long and seats were pretty cramped, but we had food and drinks and could even sleep a little. We lost a day as we crossed the international date line. The requirement was to show proof of a negative COVID test one day prior to getting onboard the ship, so we had to take a COVID test on the plane, in the middle of the night, in the dark using our phones as flashlights. We were both negative and we took photos of the results. This flight was about 15 hours long. Finally, we arrived at Sydney airport on the morning of Saturday, October 22nd. We proceeded through the airport, and everything seemed to be going smoothly. When we finally got to baggage claim, the trauma began. More than half of the people in our group had no luggage. We did get my bag, but Eddie's bag did not show up. We all stood in a very long line to put in lost luggage claims. Qantas gave us grey PJs and some toiletries. For

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some people in our group, that was all they had to wear. Finally, after getting through customs, we boarded a bus to the ship and were dropped off into a sea of thousands of people. Chaos ruled. It seems that the ship was late arriving and so everyone had to wait in extremely long lines



outside of the terminal. We finally worked our way through the long lines and all the checkpoints and got onto the ship...**Celebrity Eclipse**. Our cabin, room 1102, was small, but comfortable. Eddie and I started checking out the ship and bars while we waited for everyone to board. We ended up at the Martini Bar, which is a great frozen bar. We met up with several people from our group at the Martini bar. Dinner tonight was at 5:45pm with Linda, Jerry, Cathy, and Martha in Moonlight Sonata. After the very nice dinner, we managed to stay up until around 9pm and got a good night's sleep. Of course, the people who lost their luggage were not happy with having to wear the same clothes from the flight or the "lovely" grey PJs from Quantas. The constant complaints about this issue would prove to go on for quite a few days.

Sunday, October 23, 2022: This morning we had breakfast at the Oceanview Café, where we met Sue & Howard from London. They were very nice, and we shared travel stories with them. We spent the day checking out bars on the ship and trying to figure out how to send texts and emails. We filed a lost luggage claim with the ship and Celebrity gave us more toothpaste and toothbrushes. MMC hosted a soiree today from 3-4pm at Quasar Lounge. We all wore our grey "Lost Luggage People" PJ tops. The stories started going around about some of the mishaps of the trip so far. Martha Ross was refused her use of oxygen on the plane by Quantas, even though she had made arrangements prior to the trip. Anne Faruol, who is a recent cancer survivor, and who broke her foot just before the trip, was told in Miami that her carry-on bag was too big, so they made her check it. The bag had all her meds in it, so she was without any medication for several days. Unbelievable! Everyone was upset with the lost luggage and people started taking bets on when it would finally arrive on the ship. This was an especially bad situation, because once the ship left Sydney, we were at sea for over 2 days, then we sailed through the fiords for another day. Our first port of call would be Dunedin on day 5 of the trip.

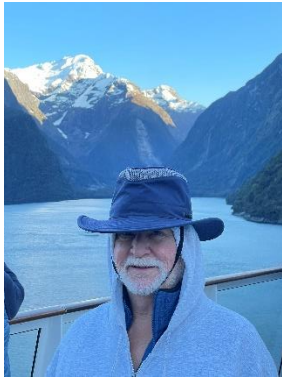


The show tonight was "**Topper**" at 7pm in the **Eclipse Theatre**. It was quite good. After the show, we walked back through the ship during the Captain's Greeting to get to our 8:30pm dinner in Moonlight Sonata with Linda, Jerry, Susie, and Dave. Eddie and I enjoyed the "Silent Disco" for a little while which was great fun. We were in bed around 11:30pm.

Monday, October 24, 2022: We have now gone through two time zones. Who knew that New Zealand was so far away from Australia! The Tasman Sea is huge! Breakfast was up on deck 14 in the cafeteria again. We met two nice ladies who traveled from NC to Dallas to Sydney. Their luggage was lost too! We enjoyed the breakfast with Bloody

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Mary's and then draft Newcastle in the Solarium. Since we are at sea again, there is not much to do except eat and drink. After a nice lunch up on deck 14, we finally got my phone to work with texts and emails and changed it to ship time. I received a text today from Maureen stating that Tonya was fine. We were relaxing on the upper pool deck listening to music, where we enjoyed ice cream and my first frozen Mudslide of the trip. Happy Hour was planned tonight for the Oceanview Bar aft, on the "flat end of the boat". We tried, but it was just much too cold and windy, so we met again at the Martini Bar. We went up to the Theatre with Linda, Jerry, and Cathy. The entertainer was Michael Griffiths, a gay Australian cabaret singer. He was quite funny and entertaining. After the show, we enjoyed dinner and then went to bed for a good night's sleep.



Tuesday, October 25th: Early this morning we arrived at Milford Sound. It is a beautiful sunny day, but extremely cold! Normally it is pouring down rain here, which is one of the rainiest places on earth. There were many beautiful waterfalls and the very small town of **Milford Sound** at the very end of the fiord. This area is called the Southern Alps. There were striking, steep mountains and we saw some mountains named Elephant and Lion. (You really had to have some imagination to see it.) Next, we saw Embrock Glacier with gorgeous scenery. There was a smaller boat that came alongside us which took some 51 passengers for an overnight excursion of the fiords. We will pick them up again tomorrow in Dunedin. A rescue boat came along beside us which was taking photos of our cruise ship, as we were the very first cruise ship that has come into Milford Sound in over 3 years. We were so very glad that we got to see the fiords in this beautiful crystal-clear weather, even though it was freezing! The ship naturalist, Milo, was describing the sights over the PA system. He was such a funny guy. He told everyone to get outside before he had to come and get us. "Wear everything you brought with you and wrap the bedding around you to keep warm. Take your small children with you and hold them up to block the wind." The ship was making its morning "bow movement" to turn around in its own length with the bow thrusters. We were in 600-1000 feet of water and on our way to Doubtful Sound and then back into the Tasman Sea where we were told it would be cold and windy. Eddie and I got cleaned up and wandered around the ship. We enjoyed Café Mocha and sat at the Martini Bar. For some reason, none of the shops or casino are open. I think it has something to do with international waters and paying fees.

There are so many unhappy people on this trip. In addition to Martha and Anne who had problems, Cathy Mendygraw said that her room was always freezing, and she is trying to get that fixed. So many people have no luggage and are forced to wear Quantas PJs everywhere. Linda Hollander's feet are swelling, and her meds are not here. We had lunch with Kim & Gary in Moonlight Sonata as the ship went past Doubtful Sound. Next was Dusky Sound and we were very close to the huge rocky shoreline with many waterfalls. Milo was once again giving us information over the PA system. "Fire shaped by Ice"...the land was pushed up by tectonic plates

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shifting so there were very high mountains which have sharp jagged peaks. The lower mountains have more rounded peaks as they have been worn down by glaciers over the millennium, therefore “fire shaped by ice”. He told us that the early explorers ran out of creativity when naming some of these places. One spot was called Wet Jacket Arm. The ship traveled between New Zealand mainland and Resolution Island. This has been a truly stunning sunny day. Milos said it is NEVER like this! After traveling through the fiords, we were now on our way to Dunedin. Tonight’s entertainment was nice, and the dinner was delicious. It is really nice to have the drink package so that we can get pretty much any drinks or wine that we want. I asked the bartender at the beginning of the cruise if Lemondrop Martinis were included and was told that there would be a \$1 upcharge. No big deal! The funny thing is that every time I ask for a Lemondrop Martini, the waiter says it will be a \$1 upcharge, but then brings me two of them!



Wednesday, October 26th: Still no luggage! Our trackers say they are still in Sydney. Today’s port is Dunedin and we have booked tour #17 with Mark as our tour guide. We drove through the Ortega area, past Port Chalmers Harbor. The Scots settled this area, and it is called the Edinburgh of the South. The population is 130,000. The average house price is \$800,000. There are lots of harbor cities and hills. Dunedin is a “City of Firsts...first cable cars, first streetlights, first University

on New Zealand, first enclosed rugby stadium. Elton John came here for a concert. Dunedin is also the wildlife capitol of New Zealand with a large albatross colony. Gold was discovered in Dunedin and there are many grapes and apricots grown here. The first botanical gardens in New Zealand are located here. We saw many beautiful yellow flowered trees which are called Kofi trees. Our first stop was at the **Botanical Gardens**, which was very beautiful. This area is also a bird sanctuary, which was good for a while because there were no predators here. Our guide told us that there were lots of rabbits in the area. Then ferrets were introduced and suddenly there were not as many rabbits and the bird population is now very low. There are no snakes in New Zealand. (Yet!)



Our drive next took us past **Baldwin Street**, quoted as the steepest street in the world. I am not too sure about this as we recently traveled on a street in St. John that seemed every bit as steep. At any rate, this was what the locals all say. Our guide told us about races that take place on this street and one year some foolish young person tried it on a skateboard. The results were not good! Our guide pointed out Eucalyptus, Copper Beech trees and many other hardwood trees. Since this is the spring here “down under”, all the trees and bushes are in full bloom.

Brown trout were introduced from Tasmania in 1985 and makes for very good fishing here. The town has many darling small houses with many of the buildings made from basalt rock. Our next stop was the 1907 railway station, which is built of basalt rock and

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pink granite. It is being refurbished now. The last steam engine was built in 1966. Diesel trains began running in 1951. Right across the street was the HM Prison, also known as Dunedin Gaol, built in 1896. The prison is Victorian in design and was based on Scotland Yard. There is a free hospital system in New Zealand. The architecture here in Dunedin is very interesting. There are several very steep streets and we drove up to the top of a very high hill for photo opps. There are many beautiful parks everywhere. Our guide told us that there are still very many earthquakes in New Zealand, but luckily, not in Dunedin.

Another fun fact is that New Zealand was the first country in the world to allow women to vote. Back in town after our ride we stopped at the First Presbyterian Church, built in 1862. The poet Robert Burns was once its minister.

Most of the people on the bus then drove back to the ship, but Ed and I got off the bus in town and stopped at Emerson's **Micro Brewery Bar** where I had Everson's Pilsner and Ed had Emerson's Hazed and Confused IPA. After a fun time mixing with the locals, we took another bus back to the ship.

Cocktails again tonight were at the Martini Bar and then we went to the show, which was fabulous! There were 3 female and 3 male performers-one named Benjamin who is referred to as "they". This was my favorite show so far on this trip. After the show we enjoyed a nice dinner with Linda & Jerry. Sadly, no bags arrived while we were in Dunedin.

Thursday, 10/27/23. Today we arrived in Christchurch. Our trackers say our luggage is here at the airport. We enjoyed a nice breakfast before we went on our excursion to **Willowbank Wildlife Sanctuary and Kotani Māori Experience**. Our guide today was Bill, who is Māori. We drove through Littleton Tunnel. There are a lot of exports and imports through the little village of Littleton, which has a population of 3,000. Bill told us that Christchurch was first settled in the 1860s and was originally built on a swamp. The population of Christchurch is 450,000 and the town suffered through two large earthquakes in 2011. It is mostly flat with hills surrounding the main town. Most of the richer people live up in the hills. We saw many horses and cows. There was a lot of green space and Christchurch is known as the Garden City. There were many ducks in the marshy areas and lots of flowering bushes and trees, especially Wisteria trees and Cherry trees. The cost is about \$450,000 for the land to build a house and about \$1 million for the house. Much timber is grown here and everything else is imported. Christchurch has many nice residential areas, a little nicer looking than those in Dunedin.

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Willowbank Wildlife was very enjoyable plus they gave us lunch. We saw many birds and animals, except it was very hard to see the famous Kiwi as they were hiding in a dark enclosure. After our lunch, we boarded the bus for the rest of our excursion. We passed by Manchester Street which is famous for its “ladies of the night”. Prostitution is legal in New Zealand. Bill told us that there was a lot of rebuilding since the bad earthquakes of 2011. Bill took us on a cold walk-through Queen Victoria Park while he told us of its history. Māori were the first people here. When the British came, they signed a treaty promising to always respect the heritage of the



Māori and not to have war with them. Of course, that didn't last. Next, we enjoyed our **Katone Māori Experience**. Both of our guides here were Māori and they gave us a history of the area. In 1100 AD the Māori people first came to the area to get eels, birds, and crawfish based on the 28 moon phases. We did a walk-through Victoria Park and learned a little about its history. Victoria Park was where the people came to trade. In the big earthquake of 2011, 90% of the buildings were damaged. The entire town center was

cordoned off for two years, and all the buildings were demolished. The suburbs suffered a lot from the earthquake. At each aftershock, mud would bubble up from the ground several inches deep. College students went around the neighborhoods to help clean up the mud. After our walk in Victoria Park, we did the Katone boat races with our Māori guides. Our boat beat the boat that Linda & Jerry were in.

On the ride back to the ship our guide told us that Littleton Harbor where we are docked was once a volcano. Our luggage arrived just as the ship was about to leave port!

Friday, 10/28/23. Today at Wellington, after breakfast, we started on our excursion to the Lord of the Rings tour. Our guide Kent looked a little like Peter Jackson, the director of all the LOTR movies. He told us that we were very lucky to have him as a guide since he was an actor and stunt double in all the films. He played a urekai, which was one of the huge monsters found in LOTR. He gave us a little of the Māori language. Tina Koi means welcome. Kiora means hello.

Wellington is the world's windiest city. It suffers 300 earthquakes per year. We drove past Sky stadium, which played a role in the LOTR films. 35,000 cricket fans in the stadium made the sounds for the Battle for Helm's Deep. Wellington is known as the Land of the Long White Cloud and is known as Rivera of the Pacific. The cost is \$1.2 million for a 1-bedroom apartment along Oriental Parade. We drove to Miramar, which means “See the Sea”. An 8.3 earthquake raised the land of Miramar, making it a peninsula.

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Kent told us that he was a stunt double for Bomba, the biggest and fattest dwarf who had 9 wives. He wore 35 pounds of prosthetic makeup for this role. We toured **WETA workshops** which was once an ice cream factory. This was an amazing place where all the prosthetics, swords, and weaponry used in the

LOTR films were created. Interestingly, even though everything was created here, it belongs to the studio, so no photography was allowed. We were able to handle swords, prosthetic noses, chainmail, etc. Our guide was very interesting.

Our next stop was Mt. Victoria. We were told that WETA studios were named after Weta, a very large cricket in New Zealand. Stone Street has several studios which were also once paint factories. There were 55 big shipping containers put together to create the giant green screen for the movies.

The first settlers came to Wellington in 1840. The first big earthquake occurred in 1855.

Vegetation was very plentiful. Before humans arrived, there were no predators, so there were lots a birds. At Mt. Victoria, we walked into the forest where parts of LOTR were filmed. The



trails were very steep. Kent had a large portfolio with scenes of the films. He showed us that we were standing exactly where the scenes were filmed and told us many funny stories about the actors. They had to do 54 takes of “I think I broke something” which had to do with a prosthetic carrot. “I think we should hide” was said by one of the hobbits. The crew cut down a huge tree from 200 miles north and dropped it down into the forest, right where we were standing for the hobbits to hid under. Kent showed us another very steep hill where the hobbits were to run up and down. Sean Astin was hired to play the part of Sam. After he was hired and before he started work, he had lost a lot of weight. Peter Jackson saw him on the first day on set and told him that he was supposed to be the fat hobbit. So, Sean ate a lot of KFC and donuts to gain back all the weight. When it was time for him to run up and down the steep hill away from the wights, he couldn’t do it. This scene took only 4 takes. After the walk in the forest, we went by bus up to the very top of Mt. Victoria and climbed the 70 steps to the observation area. There was quite a view from up here.



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The bus drove us back through “Wellywood” into town where we were dropped off to explore on our own. Kent told us of his favorite pub which was called Goldings Deep Fall. We finally found it on Leeds



Street and had beers and pizza. We walked to Te Papa Museum, a fabulous museum,



which was way too large to explore fully in a short time. We did the best we could and then walked over to where we were to pick up the shuttle bus back to the ship. We waited in line for the bus along with Sue, the entertainment director, and some of the entertainers from the ship. They had to get back soon, so they called Uber. Back on the ship we got cleaned up and went to the Martini Bar for cocktails, then to the show, which was a Keith Urban tribute show. Dinner was at 8:15 for 8 people-Jerry, Linda, Kim, Gary, Susie, Dave, Eddie, and I. All in all, this was a great day and excursion, and to top it off, everyone was happy that the luggage finally arrived, and they didn't have to wear PJs to dinner.

Saturday, 10/29/22. Today we visited Napier. Our bus driver for Bus 16 was Grant.

Unfortunately, he was not a very good tour guide. When we first got on the bus, he told us that he had not driven this bus before. He immediately went around a roundabout and almost ran into the street sign. I thought the sign was going to break the window right at my face! Grant told us very little and when he did talk, you couldn't understand him very well. An earthquake in 1931 pushed the land up. There were lots of sailboats in the harbor. Wool was a large industry



here. There were lots of wineries and apple trees. There were lots of sheep. That was about all we got from Grant. We drove to **Hastings** where there were stockyards. We stopped in Hastings to walk around a bit. There was not much to see except a **nice park with Māori statues** and an art museum. The stores were all closed. On the way back towards the ship, Grant mentioned Mt. Te Mata, a large mountain ahead of us. We stopped at a small town called



Havelock North. There was a carnival here today, so we walked around the

cute town center. I was able to buy some postcards. Back on the bus, Grant mentioned that there were fig orchards and apple orchards where the trees are planted in rows and pruned so that they can be picked by machine. Evidently, there are not enough people to pick the apples by hand. A lot of squash is grown here and sold to Japan. We drove through the town of Clive, which was a cute little town. We drove through the countryside back to Napier. I guess Grant was tired because he stopped talking altogether. At the end of our tour, we finally drove through Napier, which looks like a lovely little town, with many beautiful flower gardens, but we didn't get to see any of it. This was definitely the worst excursion so far!

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Once we got back on the ship, we slept for a little while and then went up to the Sky Lounge on deck 14 for the Concierge Cocktail Party. The show tonight, "The Diamonds", was pretty good. Dinner was with Linda & Jerry and then Eddie and I enjoyed the silent disco.

Sunday, 10/30/22. Today we stopped at Tauranga. This was a very rainy and dreary day. Our booked excursion to LOTR Hobbiton has been cancelled, which really makes me quite sad. The chance to see Hobbiton was the MAIN reason I booked this cruise. It was the very first excursion I booked. And the ship cancelled the excursion without any real reason. Therefore, we were staying on the ship today. We had breakfast up on deck 14 with Jerry & Linda. The weather was awful-still pouring rain. Lunch was up on 14 with Anne & Dennis Faruol. After lunch we went to Café Al Bario to get a café mocha and back to the room for a nap. Happy Hour was at Ensemble Lounge at 5:45, then the show at 7pm, dinner, and then to bed.

Kim & Gary were leaving the ship tomorrow in Auckland to fly home as their daughter was in the hospital. People were dropping like flies all over the ship from illness.

Monday, 10/31/22. Today we visited Auckland. Breakfast was up on deck 14. The cafeteria was decorated for Halloween. Today we went to **Kelly Tarltons Under the Sea**. and then up to **Sky Tower**. We were on bus 20 with Pete as our guide. Auckland is the largest city in New Zealand with a population of 1.5 million. The ship docked next to the ferry terminal. There are many new vehicles imported to Auckland. Pickup trucks are called "utes". There was evidently a very long waiting list for vehicles.

New Zealand has 3 main islands with 50 smaller islands. Auckland is called the City of Sails. There is very good fishing here and many volcanic hills. We drove up a steep hill to get a nice view of the harbor. Here the cost of a home is around \$1 million. Higher up the hill, on Partai Drive, the homes cost \$10 million.

Pete told us that rugby is the national sport played during the summer. Cricket is played during the winter months. Pete said that cricket is a very odd game...you play for 5 days, and nobody wins. Bastion Point is the area where cricket is played.



Our first stop was **Kelly Tarlton's**, which was opened in 1984. Kelly was a diver and explorer. He wanted everyone to be able to see the underwater wonders, so he built this sea world. Seven months after it opened, over 100,000 people had visited. That very night in 1985, Kelly died in his sleep at the age of 47. What a sad story!

It was fun to see all the fish, rays, and sharks swimming all around us as we walked through the tunnels of the underwater park. The penguins were very cool.

After Kelly Tarlton's, we were back on the bus for a little city tour. In every port we were told that we are the first cruise ship to visit in over 2 years. The city is full of beautiful trees called

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Pajutokowa with bright red flowers. This looks very nice around Christmas. We drove by a rose garden. The Parnell area is a very desirable place to live. Education is free in Auckland. We drove past the Holy Trinity Cathedral and the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Auckland Domain is a pretty park with lots of different trees and plants. Seedlings were brought from England in the 1890s. There are 3 universities with 20,000 students. K Road is famous for its prostitutes and gays. Queen Street runs 5 blocks down to the harbor. Auckland is currently building an underground railway system. New Zealand won the America's Cup in 1985.



We were dropped off at **Sky Tower** and took the elevator up 50 floors to the observation tower. There were great views of all of Auckland. Some adventurous people were sky jumping off the building...not for me! We did a little shopping then went on the bus back to the ship. Eddie was not well. He went directly to bed. I brought him a café mocha in the afternoon. We had our dinner at **La Petit Chef @ 5:30**, but Martha didn't join us. She has COVID. This was a very fun

experience, but Eddie was shivering throughout the entire dinner. I gave him my wrap to try and get him warm. We went right back to the room after our dinner and Eddie had a temp of 101.6. I gave him Excedrin as I didn't have any Tylenol. I stayed in the room with him, so we missed all the Halloween activities. The entire boat was decorated and looked very festive.



Tuesday, 11/1/22. Today we began our voyage back towards Sydney Australia. We were sailing through the Tasman Sea again and it was very windy and rough. Eddie had been in bed for over 12 hours, and he continued to stay in bed all day. I brought him breakfast and later brought him another café mocha. I packed up one of our suitcases and then went down to Serendipity for their sale and bought a few more things. The Captain now said that

there are winds of 50 mph right across the bow of the ship and that seas are expected to be 20 feet around 6pm. There were many cases of COVID on the ship, so everyone needed to wear masks. Many people were ignoring this directive. Martha still had COVID and was not able to leave her room. We watched a movie on TV. Our room phone was still not working. We both got cleaned up and met Cathy, Linda, & Jerry at the Ensemble Lounge for drinks and music. Afterwards, we enjoyed the show. Dinner tonight was lobster and beef Wellington, which was delicious. We went right to bed after dinner, so missed the late entertainment again. The ship was very rocky now.

Wednesday, 11/2/22. This was another day at sea. The ship rocked and rolled all night long. I had managed to catch whatever Eddie had since he coughed all night. We went up for breakfast on deck 14, then I went right back to bed. I planned to spend the day in my room. I had to finish packing that night. Our group had a meeting at 10:30 to discuss disembarkation. During this time, the Captain came on the PA system and said that due to the bad seas, which will continue to get worse as the day goes on, we will arrive 3 hours late into Sydney Harbor. Another day,

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another fuck up! No one knows how this will screw up our Sydney tour, but we will probably not get to see the Sydney Opera House. This was the 2nd main reason I booked this cruise!

During this meeting, we discovered that some man from Germany lost his passport, and the ship threw him off in Auckland. One couple from our group had never gotten any of their luggage at all. Many of our group were sick. This has been the trip from hell in many respects!

We watched LOTR Fellowship of the Ring on TV. This was not as good as it would have been to actually see Hobbiton, but it was a great movie and we enjoyed watching it again. The boat was really rocking and rolling even more now. There were creaking sounds in our room. I pulled back the curtains to look at the roiling seas...Holy Shit!! We finished the movie, while holding on to the bed so that I wouldn't fall off with all the rolling of the ship. We went down to the Martini Bar for Happy Hour. We had lost time due to the very rough seas and now would be 3 hours late getting into port at Sydney, so we now know that we will miss much of our scheduled tour. The show for tonight was cancelled since the boat is rocking too much and it would be unsafe for the aerialists. Diamond Girls did another show, and they were good, but I was so disappointed that we could not see the aerialist show. We managed to get through the show and dinner, but I was feeling pretty bad, so I went up to the room to go to bed. The ship continued to rock and roll badly all night.



Thursday, 11/3/22. I woke up feeling very bad. The Captain made an announcement that we lost even more time last night due to the rough seas and we will now not get into Sydney harbor till at least noon. I could not breathe well at all today.



At least we could see a little of Sydney harbor from the ship as we sailed in. It looked like a beautiful city. Too bad we could not spend more time here and in the rest of Australia.



Once the ship finally docked, the disembarkation was very speedy. We all finally got off the ship



and boarded our tour bus, except for Martha Ross who was not allowed off the ship until all the other passengers had disembarked. She had to find a ride to our hotel where she was forced to stay in her room. Bianca, our tour guide, was from Italy and was very hard to understand. We did



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lose our Sydney Opera House tour. The bus drove us through The Rocks. We were told that Sydney had a lot of prisoners who had to help build the city. The Oldest Pub is called Hero of Harbor. The population of Sydney is 5 million. We drove through the newest part of the city built after 2008, Darling Harbor. We boarded another small boat for a harbor cruise with buffet lunch. There were many beautiful buildings, and we went past the Opera House, which was an amazing building. After our ride, we went to our hotel, Radisson Blu to room 424. This room seemed huge after being on the cruise ship. We got about an hour to rest before we went by bus to another restaurant on the water named Cyren. It was nice with very good food, but we couldn't eat it all. Back to the hotel for a good night's sleep.

Friday, 11/4/22. We enjoyed a buffet breakfast at the hotel and then boarded our bus for our next adventure. Our bus driver Sam was very funny. Our guide was Sophie. We drove through Harborside where we were yesterday. Sophie told us that a 2-bedroom home costs well over a million to buy. Most of the population lives in the western part of Sydney. There was a height limit for buildings until 1973. We drove across the Anzac Bridge, which was very impressive. Most cars here were Toyotas. There were 2 flags at the very top of the bridge-Australia and New Zealand. There was much road construction everywhere.

A typical home is now like in California with lots of glass. We went through a very large tunnel which cost \$8 for cars to use. Homebush is where the Olympics was held in 2020. It was now used by locals and has been a very successful venture. Sydney is very multicultural. Townhouses are about \$800,000.



Our first stop was **Featherdale Wildlife Park**, where we will see many kangaroos. Sophie told us many facts about the animals. The Red kangaroo was the most populous. South Australian kangaroos were darker and hairy. Rock Wallabies were very friendly, and we could even feed them. The Australian



coat of arms has a kangaroo and an emu on it. Emus cannot move backwards. They are very interesting animals. They mate for life and are very close to each other. Their eggs are deep green. The father looks after the emu chicks. Once the babies are old enough to fly the mother comes back. The Cassowary bird looks like a dinosaur. The males and females hate each other. There are 2 types of Cockatoos-white and red Crested black. Wombats eat all day. Martha is an Island off Tasmania where Wombats roam freely. Dingos, which look like a cross between a fox and a dog, don't bark or howl. Fraser Island has Dingos roaming free.

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We are so excited to see the Koalas here. They eat only fresh leaves from eucalyptus trees. This stop was amazing as we got to have our photo with a koala and touch them. Our Koala was named Lawson. Sophie says that in another year or so, they won't be doing this anymore. We took lots of photos of Kangaroos, Koalas, and the amazing Cassowary, which looked like a dinosaur with a bright blue head. If you lived in Queensland, you could have a dingo for a pet, but they are best left in the wild. Aboriginal people are very close to them.

Our funny bus driver Sam gave us a few colloquialisms: "Tradies" drive utes. "Postira" are mailmen. "Brickies" are bricklayers. "Sparkies" are electricians. Plumbers are just called "sir".

We next took the bus to the Blue Mountains for our next adventure. Sophie told of the wars between aboriginals and the white man. Governor MacQuarrie organized an extensive expedition to the Blue Mountains, an area which is rich in coal and shale. It also holds the largest concentration of eucalyptus trees, which feeds the animals and indigenous peoples. The aboriginal people have been here for 65,000 years and are the longest living group of people in Australia. However, they are still not recognized in the Australian constitution. They have many languages. We passed a large bridge which had two flags-the Australian flag and the Aboriginal flag.

Sophie told us that the inflation rate was about 7% now and the unemployment rate was about 4%. People here believe that they are expected to get a job. Kids are motivated to become independent. The health care industry is the number one industry. An ambulance ride will cost \$150. The crime rate is typical of other countries. There is virtually no gun violence. The biggest crime is drugs from Asia. Young Aussie kids are very wholesome.

We are traveling to Katoomba, an area where there are no high-rise buildings. Each town has bush fire volunteers. Public schools are very good and are free. Many people from Sydney have never been to the Blue Mountains.

Sophie also told us that TimTams is the national biscuit, and they are quite delicious. Mr. Arnie owns Arnie's biscuits. He went to the Kentucky Derby and the horse who won was named Tim Tam, so he made a chocolate biscuit and named it after the racehorse. Sophie said that the best

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way to enjoy them is to bite the ends off the biscuits and suck your hot chocolate or coffee through your TimTams. Another interesting food from Australia is Vegemite. Sophia said that you take white bread, toast it, then slather butter on it, spread Vegemite on it and fold it in half to have it with a cup of tea.

The tallest peak is Mt. Konestmo at about 7,000 feet high. This area is called the Great Dividing Range and is good for snow skiing. The Katoomba area can be a very hostile environment. It is full of snakes and spiders. The red backed spider is very thin and deadly. The Funnelwood spider is also very common in this area. It is milked for venom. There are Red bellied black snakes, and Brown snakes which are very aggressive and very fast. The Lyre bird copies every sound it hears. It identifies with Aboriginal people.

We stopped for lunch at a lovely little restaurant called Mountain Heritage, which was delicious. There were amazing views from the balcony. The Blue Mountains were not actually blue, but the color is due to evaporation of oil from the gum trees.

After lunch we were back on the bus to **Scenic World**, our next big adventure. Here we rode the steepest train in the world-a 60-degree incline. Then we walked on a flat runway until we arrived at a cable car to the top of the mountain, then a carriageway across the gorge to the other side. We went over the Napiam River. This was called "crossing the blue mountains". We stopped at Echo Point for some photos.

On our bus ride home, we sang the Kookaburra Song and Waltzing Matilda. This was for good luck when you left the Blue Mountains.

"Once a Swagman camped by the billabong, under the shade of the Coolibar tree, and he sang as he watched and waited till his Billie boiled, you'll come a waltzing Matilda with me."

Sophie was an outstanding tour guide. As we came back into Sydney, we rode past Pitt Street to George Street. She told us about James Squires who opened a brewery. He had 4 wives and very good beers. She told us that we needed to be out of our room and on the bus by 6:30am tomorrow.

When we got to the hotel, we asked our concierge where his favorite place to eat was located and he told us about a great little restaurant within walking distance. Jerry, Linda, Eddie, and I walked there and had great drinks and burgers...a fitting ending to our journey in Sydney.

Saturday, 11/5/22. We checked out of our room and boarded the bus to the airport for our very long flight back home. Once again, this proved to be a challenge. The flight from Sydney to Los Angeles was going to be about 15 hours long. After we got through security at the airport, we went to our gate area. There were about 20 of us that got there first, then someone from security came and placed an iron fence around us. We were not allowed to leave without permission and the others in our group were not allowed to come inside the barrier. I have absolutely no idea what this was about! Inside this area with us was a young mother and child

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who was very loud and rambunctious while in the waiting area. Once we boarded the plane, of course we were in “steerage”-the last row of the plane, and they were in the row right in front of us. The kid talked, fussed, and cried the entire time. Somehow, we managed to survive this extremely long trip. At LAX we finally boarded our next flight to Miami which was over 5 hours. We were not in the very last row of the plane this time, but we were right in front of another mother and child, about 2 or 3 years old, who literally screamed at the top of his lungs for the entire flight-from take off until we landed in Miami, 5 very long hours later. Everyone around us was having a nervous breakdown because of the noise. I had headphones on the entire time, and it was still deafening. This was truly the flight from hell! I felt very bad for the stewardesses.

When we finally got off this flight, surprisingly we all found our luggage and managed to get through the airport without much trouble and onto our bus which took us back to Marco Island. Everyone cheered when we finally crossed the top of the Jolly Bridge. It was now quite late, but we were all very happy to be back home!

As I looked back on this trip, and listened to everyone ‘s complaints about it, I realized that it was quite challenging, and disappointing in a few ways. A trip to Australia and New Zealand had always been very high on my bucket list. There were good things and bad things about this trip.

The bad things first. It was an EXTREMELY long trip to get there, and this was made worse by the airlines that we had to use. Neither airline was particularly helpful when booking seats. We paid extra for better seats and were not given them. On the very long flight over, one half of the entire plane had non-functioning toilets. Then Qantas managed to lose the luggage for over half of our entire group, and we didn’t get those lost bags until 6 days into the trip. Several people had issues, such as not having necessary meds with them, as the airlines made them check their carry-on bags. The itinerary would have been much better if we had flown into New Zealand first, so that we would not have had to endure over 5 days at sea going back and forth through the very rough Tasman Sea. New Zealand, what we got to see of it, was lovely. In retrospect, I think it would have been better to do it by land instead of by cruise ship. My biggest disappointment was having my favorite excursion, LOTR Hobbiton, cancelled. My second biggest disappointment was having the tour of Sydney Opera House cancelled. My third biggest disappointment was that we were unable to book an extension so that we could see more of Australia.

Now for the good things. The cruise ship was beautiful, with delicious food, excellent bars, very good entertainment, wonderful staff, and we were with a group of great people. New Zealand was a very beautiful country and I really wish we had been able to see more of it. Sydney was a beautiful city with lots to see and do. We really needed a few more days there.

Created by Cindy Crane, Marco Island, FL

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