

TRAVEL PEOPLE

Down Under's land of 'Oz' is fascinating

The author is a Phoenix resident.

By Tracey Hayes
Special for The Republic

Embark on a trip to the wonderful and magical land of Oz, with no cyclone needed. It's 14 hours by airplane from Los Angeles.

Australia, known by its nickname of "Oz," is a fascinating world. Koalas, Sydney's opera house and harbor, rain forests and Great Barrier Reef combine to offer adventure Down Under.

Cairns, in the northern region, offers a tropical rain-forest environment. The main attraction is Great Barrier Reef. There are opportunities aplenty to snorkel and scuba dive. Amazing sea life abounds to view and touch. (Touch only what the dive master allows you to touch.) The coup de grâce was feeding a giant sea turtle while I explored this strange world.

The less adventurous can view these unparalleled attractions from a semisubmersible submarine or a stationary underwater platform.

Interesting creatures also inhabit the land. At Wild World Cairns (www.cairnsattractions.com, click on "Wild World Cairns" from menu on left) in Queensland, a visitor can hold a koala (memorable photograph also available), feed kangaroos (including females with their joeys), watch a crocodile show, pet a wombat, view the world's deadliest snake (from a safe distance, of course) and race a cane toad. Adults and children alike will be entranced with the native wildlife.

If your interests lean toward people and native cultures, the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (www.tjapukai.com.au) in Queensland allows you to learn about Australia's original inhabitants and provides the opportunity to throw a boomerang. You also can experience life at Wetherby Station (www.wetherbystation.com), an Aussie cattle ranch in Queensland. Watch a roundup and then dine on Australian roast beef.

Next on the itinerary is Sydney, which offers cosmopolitan delights accented by architectural and natural beauty. Views of Sydney Harbour and Sydney Opera House do not disappoint. Tour the showcase opera house during the day, then return for an enjoyable performance in the evening. Climb to the top of Sydney Harbour Bridge for a breathtaking view.

Sydney has an abundance of activities and attractions, with the added incentive of easy transit (ferries, buses, train and monorail). Time well spent includes harbor boat tours and visits to the Botanical Gardens, Sydney Aquarium, Bondi Beach (a famous surfing paradise) and Hyde Park Barracks (with the story of the first settlers/convicts).

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DETAILS: Qantas Airways, www.qantas.com.

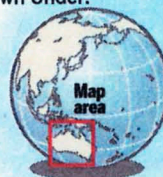


Courtesy of Tracey Hayes

For Tracey Hayes, holding a koala was memorable, but it was only one of the hands-on activities at Wild World Cairns, in Queensland.

Australia - the land of Oz

Koalas, Sydney's Opera House and Harbor, rain forests, and the Great Barrier Reef all combine to offer plenty of adventure in the land Down Under.



Kee Rash/The Arizona Republic