

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

Australia: an entire continent almost like a zoo



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Australia, or officially the Commonwealth of Australia, is the smallest continent. Despite having been here for altogether more than 30 months already, we always love to return. Due to its very diverse and omnipresent wildlife, the entire country somehow feels like a huge zoo. With its surface of 7,617,930 square kilometres, Australia is the world's sixth largest country. The 25 million inhabitants, of whom most live along the coast, still make Australia one of the least populated nations. Sydney (pop. 5,1 million) is the country's biggest city and Canberra (pop. 350,000) the capital. Australia became independent from the UK in 1907, but still belongs to the British Commonwealth, with Queen Elizabeth II as head of the state.

As on most Pacific Islands, also Australia's indigenous population declined sharply after the first contact with Europeans, because the Aborigines had no immunity to disease brought in by the white man. For a long time, the white colonizers did not respect them as legal land owners. In contrary; everything was acceptable to get rid of the Aborigines. There was no law protecting them. We read stories of missionaries considering Aborigines as animals, because they didn't follow the same faith.



Australia's indigenous people never integrated well into the new society. Until 1967, they were not even considered Australian citizens, and simply ignored by the census. Until 1970, many Aboriginal children, especially of mixed decent, were forcefully removed from their mothers. Churches, missions and the government wanted to ram faith and western mindset into them! Those unfortunate people are nowadays revered to as the "lost generation".

Many of the first white settlers to Australia, were prisoners deported from the UK. As Great Britain intended to thin out its lower-class, even a minor trespass was sufficient, to get deported to this giant prison island. Many pioneers followed voluntarily in search of a new and better life.

Nowadays, Australia is a classic immigration country with settlers predominantly from the British Isles, the European continent and Asia. The country consists of 8 states and territories, with partly very different laws. For instance, selling a vehicle in a different Australian state than it was bought, can be a mayor hassle.

Australia has 8,222 islands within its maritime borders. The biggest and best-known ones are the state of Tasmania (64,519 km²), Melville Island (5,786 km²), Kangaroo Island (4,416 km²), Groote Eylandt (2,285 km²), Bathurst Island (1,693 km²) and Fraser Island (1,653 km²).

The Territories of Australia also include Norfolk Island in the Pacific Ocean, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Christmas Island and the Ashmore- and Cartier-Islands in the Indian Ocean, as well as the sub Antarctic Heard, McDonald & Macquarie Islands. Furthermore, also Australia claims a territory in the Antarctica.

Melbourne: a modern bustling city

Our Australian adventure started on February 25th 2018, when we alighted from our first flight with a A380. Emirates Airline brought us in style from Auckland to Melbourne. Knowing the city has 4,7 million inhabitants, you know it is a big place and it gets ever bigger and more modern. Being Australia's second largest city, Melbourne has a fair share of ultra-modern skyscrapers. The city attracted many immigrants from around the world, but recently predominantly from India and Asia. Together, they gave the once a bit dull city a real boost. The city has now a perfect blend between Victorian buildings and contemporary creative architecture. We love the bustling centre, the many parks and the lively promenade along the Yarra River.



We also love

Melbourne's multicultural atmosphere and consider it a big asset. The suburbs are characterized by the different immigrant groups. The city centre feels nowadays very Asian not just from the faces but also from the stores and the wide choice of cheap and healthy Asian eateries. Ironically, in Chinatown it's "the white Australians" that stand out negatively, because the girls dress up like tarts for hunting, and cocks & hens because they drink until they drop. Asians, on the other hand, rather socialize around a meal.

Tasmania: a sunny week on the island reputed for bad weather



On March 5th, we flew to Australia's island-state of Tasmania. We spent our first 4 days in the pretty capital Hobart, nicely situated on a natural harbour with a lively promenade. That the fishing vessels had been shifted to the outskirts, is certainly better for the fishermen, yet it took parts of the charm off the harbourfront. Hobart felt much more European than continental Australia. Here we found proper bakeries, a deli shop called "Wursthaus", and the population appeared European as well.

As we drove by bus to Launceston, we passed road signs for villages like Interlaken and Grindelwald. At our destination, we ate at a Thai restaurant which was run by a German immigrant. In Launceston, we stayed again in a backpacker's double room. The town itself surprised us with many well maintained colonial buildings.

From Launceston, we joined two daytrips to see a bit of the countryside. One led us to the famous Cradle Mountain national park. We hiked around Lake Dove and visited other



parts of the park where we were lucky to be able to observe Wallabys and Pademelons, an even smaller Kangaroo specie. We were also fortunate, to see live Wombats for the first time in our lives. Those cute animals appear like small bears, yet they are marsupials walking on four legs. As they dig burrows, mother nature thoughtfully equipped females with a baby-pouch opening towards the back. Apart from some Pademelon species, Tasmania has conserved more wildlife that once was widespread on the Australian continent, like the very shy carnivorous and scavenging marsupials Tasman Devil, or the Spotted-tail Quoll (both resembling weasel), which we unfortunately only encountered stuffed in a national park centre.



Sure enough, tours always stop at those touristy places, we'd never go otherwise. We visited cheese-factories and a lavender farm. The latter gets overrun by visitors from China, after a Chinese actress posted a picture of her on the internet, holding a lavender-stuffed purple teddy from that farm. After the Chinese president got one of these unique plush species as a gift, demand increased that much that visitors are now restricted to buying only one each!

Our second excursion brought us to the sandy beaches on the east coast, all framed by deep blue water. After tasting fresh

oysters from a nearby aquaculture farm, we visited Cosy Bay. Here, you find big round boulders, covered in bright orange lichen. The rocks look great and tempt visitors to climb up. Unfortunately, one of our group made a stumble and fell. It didn't look that dramatic, but as those rocks aren't accessible easily, she had to be airlifted to a hospital by helicopter.



Touring around Australia by car: buying or hiring?

Altogether, we've already spent more than 2 ½ years on the red continent, so we know Australia quite well. Twice, we've bought a car and sold it after almost a year of travelling around. For a longer discovery trip, buying a vehicle and selling it at the end, is certainly the best choice. For shorter trips, we believed as yet, it's best to rent a car. Though for what we know now, there are only a handful of odd exceptions, we would recommend hiring a vehicle.



1991-1992



2005-2006



2018-2019

This time, we intended initially to spend three months only, re-visiting some of our favourites with rental-cars. However, after reading the fine-prints of Australian car-rental contracts, we've found too many exclusions that would leave us without insurance cover at all! We'd be liable for the entire value of the car in cases like if the car gets damaged on the roof, if it gets flooded, even in an underground parking, if we hit an animal or a tree, if we would dare to drive on a gravel road, or above the snow line, and so on... Bayswater in Sydney and Perth was the only car rental company we found with acceptable rental conditions. However, their restricted radius to "driveabout", and first of all, their extraordinary strict "no gravel road policy" was unacceptable to us. Even on a 50-meter-long gravel strip between the sealed main road and your accommodation, insurance cover is void!

Considering all this, we've decided it's probably smarter to buy a car again, and consequently, spend more time in Aussieland than initially intended ... This is the privilege of those having more time than money.

After returning from Tasmania to Melbourne on March 13th 2018, we started looking for a suitable travel companion. After a good week, we'd found what we hoped is our needle in the haystack: a 6 ½ year old Nissan Tiida with about 100,000km and four new tyres for AUD 5,800 (€ 3,600). Happily, we set off to discover more of Victoria (and of course all of Australia) than just its capital Melbourne.

Victoria's countryside: sunburnt hills and goldrush towns



Already on the first day with our own car, we encountered almost the “full program” of what one shouldn't do with a rental car. Single lane roads, gravel roads, crossing (today dry) creeks and roadwork-caused gravel sections in sealed roads – and this all within 50 km of Melbourne!

Our first destination was Ballarat that rose during the 1850 goldrush. Many beautiful colonial buildings still witness this period. Further along the goldrush trail, we got to Newstead, Maldon and Castlemaine before reaching Bendigo. Here, we stayed for 3 days and marvelled again at the beautiful colonial

buildings, the historic tourist tram, and the flying foxes (bats) in the town park.

Further east, Victoria gets quite park, Brigitte remembers from our get a big motel room, but an entire and despite having the whole extend our stay, as everything was booked as of Good Friday, not only place, but in the entire area! So we one day, to re-explore Mount Buffalo national park, where we were again, almost the sole visitors. It was a beautiful day to see the waterfalls, little lakes and countless rock formations on top of this mountain. We noticed an astonishing number of balancing rocks, all seemingly glued to the mountain. Even if we had only one day on Mount Buffalo; it was more than worthwhile.



mountainous, and we picked just one national last trip: Mount Buffalo. This time, we didn't holiday flat. Easter holiday was approaching apartment complex to ourselves, we couldn't fully at our had only



Helios: a naturist club in Melbourne's countryside

Even on long weekends, when keen trippers book seemingly everything available, there are still some places that are rarely full in Australia: naturist clubs and resorts.

Our destination was Helios, a pleasant naturist club in Gembrook, about 60 km southeast of Melbourne. Ahead of our first stage at Helios, some 12 years ago, we unintendedly caused big troubles to the club. They decided to take our reservation, despite not having a cabin, suitable for a fortnight stay! However, the committee took our request as a reason to go ahead with a project that had been in cold storage for a long time. So, within a few weeks only, a ramshackle old cabin had been transformed into a shiny new one! We felt quite pampered.

This time, the club caused us unintendedly a small problem. Nobody seemed to be in charge of responding to our short notice demand (10 days ahead) to spend Easter 2018 at Helios. As common in member operated clubs, everything relies on volunteers. Coincidentally, the public-relations manager was on a business trip overseas, and his deputy had a short notice business assignment in another corner of Australia! Well, finally we were lucky; just after we had given up any hope to spend Easter “au naturel” and ventured into the Australian Alps instead (despite everything being booked out between good Friday and Easter Monday), someone from Helios finally confirmed they have a cabin for us available. We were ever so glad. Crossing very heavy Easter traffic, we arrived at the naturist club in Gembrook on March 30th, 2018.



We loved to walk around Helios' 100 maintained boardwalk leads through a gleam magnificently in the late afternoon those members helping to pay for the caravan or a cottage and spend almost Australian naturist clubs, many members predominantly Germans and Dutch. applied for membership already before keen naturalists like those who founded the celebrate its 60th anniversary.



acres-estate of bushland and forest. A well-lovely section with gum- and fern trees, which sun. Many planks bear the engraved names of boardwalk. Almost 200 member-/families have a every summer-weekend here. As in most are immigrants, among them some Asians, but Several with German roots told us, they had boarding the ship to Australia. It must have been club in 1958. In June 2018, Helios could already

We were agreeable surprized about the number of younger folks at Helios. A committee member told us, the club was a bit overaged until a few years ago. Then, they got some changes underway to attract young couples and families and this was obviously a success! Already the generous facilities, including sports- and play-fields, barbeques, a sauna, two jacuzzies, a swimming-pool and more, make the club very attractive. Social events are regularly held in the large club-house and if no function is going on, members and visitors alike socialize regularly around the fireplace.

On the weekends, it was quite lively at Helios. Also during the week, the club-ground was still far from being lonely, due to the big number of feathered and quadruped visitors. Wildlife abound, we encountered kookaburras and parrots, and along Helios' boundaries also Kangaroos - once even a few dozen. Quite often, a wombat roamed around our cottage during the night. There is also a small risk of meeting less desired creatures, like poisonous spiders or snakes. Luckily, likewise most members, we've encountered only the uncountable "snake emergency kits" distributed all over the grounds. Australia's biggest treat to humans are anyway rather the biggest joy of overseas visitors; the uncountable kangaroos and wallabies - nice to watch, but responsible for many car accidents!

Helios is situated in the Dandenong Ranges, with 633m tall Mount Dandenong being the highest peak. Several small nice villages invite for outings. Scones with jam and whipped cream is omnipresent. Among the region's biggest attractions is probably the Puffing Billy, a well preserved narrow-gauge railway, operated by a group of volunteers. This train runs from Gembrook to Belgrave. For those who might want to visit Melbourne with a day-pass by public transport, Belgrave (only half an hour by car from Helios) is ideal to catch the metro. For our part, we just stayed at Helios and enjoyed a peaceful and sunny week. This gave us enough time to forge our plans travelling Australia as "wandering bares"....



Gippsland: Victoria's attractive south-east coast

On April 8th 2018, we left our sunny paradise in the Dandenongs and continued to discover Victoria's eastern coastal region, between Melbourne and the border of New South Wales (NSW). Our first stop in Gippsland, as this region is also known, was in the town of Sale. It was the ideal base to explore the Sale Common Wetland Reserve that stretches until the sand dunes bordering the impressive golden 90-Mile Beach. This endless beach not only offers endless fun for everyone, together with a narrow landstrip along the coast, it also separates a giant system of saltwater lakes, and inlets respectively, from the open sea.

After backtracking via Sale, we didn't make it much further until it was time to look for a place to stay again. After

daylight saving ended on the last week-end, it got dark now already shortly after 6 pm. We got a posh motel room in Paynesville, from where we made the 5 minutes ferry-crossing to Raymond Island. Just in time before sunset, and again the next morning, we went Koala spotting. The inhabited island is full of gum trees and therefore, the conservation department monitors a large population of free-living Koala bears that have been resettled on this island, where they developed very well. As most visitors, we were lucky to spot more than a dozen of these cute little creatures that spend 20 hours of the day sleeping in a tree, and only four hours a day eating its leaves.



After driving around another of East Gippsland's giant saltwater lakes, we reached Metung, a popular resort village. After lunch we continued to Lakes Entrance, probably named so, because here ships can enter from the open sea into the huge lake system. Despite being even more touristy than the places visited previously, Lakes Entrance is really charming, predominantly thanks to its large fleet of fishing trawlers. There is a several kilometres long promenade along the inlet and a footbridge spanning it, to reach the so-called surf-beach, the western end of 90-Mile Beach.



Before we were back in the village centre, the sunset-colours got diffused by a mystical sea mist that suddenly swallowed the sun. Admiring this changed scenery, and some beautiful sea birds like sea gulls, black swans, pelicans, cormorants and ducks, we were caught by an unexpected shower. So, we headed straight for the stationary floating boat, with a promising seafood restaurant that delighted our palate. As in the previous places we stayed, fast-food abounded, but it was also easy to find various decent restaurants.

The next day, we were again rewarded with some more fascinating seascapes, especially around the coastal village of Marlo at the mouth of Snowy River. There were several great lookouts giving great views of half-exposed sand bars.



After the village called Cann River, we turned off to the interior towards NSW and ACT (Australian Capital Territory). The landscape changed to higher hills with either sparse forests of gum trees or dry meadows. Along our way, we also passed a village by the name of Bombala. Only later, we learned that it is home to a large Platypus population and that it would have been possible, to spot them in the creek flowing through the village.

Instead, we noticed something else; after driving over desolate hills with withering grass, shortly before sunset the sun re-appeared through low-lying clouds and bathed the landscape in a shining gold.

Cooma, an appealing village in NSW was where we ended up for the night. Contrary to what you'd expect on 800m above sea level, it was 30°C hot, a seamless attunement for our stage at a naturist place that was to start the next day.

ACT Nudist Club: nude in a city-bus

On April 12th 2018, we reached the Australian capital Canberra, respectively the friendly bares at ACT (Australian Capital Territory) Nudist club. It is situated on ACT soil between the NSW villages of Queanbeyan and Bungendore. Geoff and Christine, a member couple, met us at the gate with a warm welcome. To our honour, a Swiss flag was risen and the next day, the flag of Geneva blew in the wind. It turned out that Christine was based for several years for an NGA (Non-Government Organisation) in Geneva.



Canberra's Naturist club is a very social affair with about 130 members. Mid-April equals about mid-October in Europe, but never the less, around 25 members gathered for the regular pizza night in the clubhouse. As pizza ingredients had not been on our shopping list when we stopped for groceries en route, we were simply being invited. So, we too, could assemble a pizza with the provided base and toppings, which was then baked in the club's large wood fired pizza-oven. Everybody gathered around a big table and we enjoyed a very pleasant evening, meeting an interesting bunch of people, from young sheila's to grumpy old men. To us, it was a perfect social circle, not too big, not too small, just right to get to know everybody.



The nice pizza oven is certainly not the club's only peculiarity. Another one is a large, articulated bus the members purchased at an auction from Canberra's public transport department. Half of the bus had been transformed into a comfortable and modern guest accommodation with kitchen, a small lounge, and a comfy double bed. That way, we got a very unique studio apartment and we really appreciated the original bus-benches on the dining table. We heard that the second half of the bus shall be transformed into a family accommodation. It was just fun to be naked in a bus, and even more so on the

driver's seat, but we're not sure whether we would dare to board one in the buff that still drives after a schedule! It was well equipped, and the few things missing were all available in the communal kitchen at the clubhouse.

ACT Nurturist Club is small and personal. Everybody trusts everybody; visitors and members alike. Not only the self-service drinks at the club house are paid into an honesty box, but also the overnight fees. We loved the self-service capsule coffee-machine in the communal kitchen; it gave us an excellent start every morning.

During the week, the grounds got quiet, and one evening, we had everything to ourselves, despite the warm autumn-temperatures. However, there was no time for boredom: When walking the three-kilometre-long track along the border of the club's 40 ha large grounds, we always saw dozens of kangaroos hopping around. It was lots of fun to watch those unique marsupials on our daily rounds. There were also lots of birds, from parrots to kookaburras and some small, incredibly nervous species, almost impossible to watch. Very impressive were also the uncountable gum trees, especially in the evening sun. As beautiful they are to look at, Australians dub them widow-trees, as they often shed a big branch.

Canberra's bares are well organised, and visitors are always welcome. Even on midweek days, when nobody was present, there was always a member popping up to let visitors in, who had notified their arrival. Around ANZAC-Day, there were some 10 interstate visitors, and the two of us. Midweek, there were often some of the very enthusiastic members visiting for the day, just to work and to make their club an even better one. A new pool and a wood fired sauna had recently been completed. A sun room and more of the very reasonably priced visitor's accommodations are under construction.

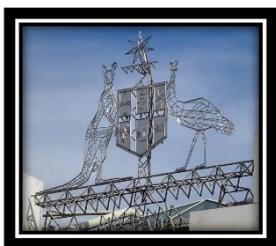
The club could already celebrate its 42nd anniversary in 2018. Some of the founding members are still very active, like John and Heather. He is one of the former presidents, and still works hard for the club.



Heather told us, at founding she

was only 21, when she suddenly became the secretary, not knowing what she had to do! It certainly needed lots of courage to start a nurturist club 42 years ago, but the insistence of a bunch of people knowing each other from a nudist beach payed out. Finally, the ACT government gave them a piece of land, and a grant to start building a club ground. What Canberra's passionate bares made of it, is very impressive and we are ever so glad, they shared their little paradise with us for a fortnight...

Canberra: the capital designed on the drawing board



As it was a perfect Indian summer, we were not that motivated to leave our nurturist paradise for excursions, but felt obliged to visit at least the capital. When Australia got independent from the UK, its two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne both fought to become the capital. It was a long story, finalising in a compromise: the capital was to be in a new town, yet to be drafted on the drawing board. A huge piece of land with a waterbody in the interior hills had been selected. The town name of Canberra was a blend between the Aboriginal word 'Ngunbra' (meaning meeting place) and the white settler's proposal 'Canberry'.

As any place designed on the drawing board, the town is very modern and got some special features. Two of the largest complexes, the parliament house and a big war memorial take centre stage. They seem to be pretty near of each other, as there is only a big straight avenue between them. However, there are 5km in between and furthermore, a river interrupts the alley.

The war memorial is impressive and depressive at the same time. Long walls bear the names of tens of thousands of Australians who had given the "ultimate sacrifice" for their country. Knowing that many of the countries that were freed during these wars, finally voted in some fundamental clerics or populist and nationalist leaders that transformed to dictators, we're not sure, whether those sacrifices were worth it!

After this emotional visit, we joined a tour of the new Parliament Building that appears to be partly underground. It focussed less on the architecture than on the history of the Australian Democracy. We learned that there is lots of ceremonial stuff to be observed by



members of parliament and justice. But that's probably in any constitutional monarchy, where politicians are often obliged to symbolically ask the monarch for whatever they want to do.

Blue Mountains: intact yet accessible nature

Leaving Canberra's bars via the pretty town of Goulburn, and a convenient over-night stop at Oberon, we reached the



Blue Mountains. Basing ourselves in a Motel at Blackheath, we went about to visit the surrounding viewpoints. We took the trouble to go also to the most famous, and most crowded sight: the rock pillars named the three sisters. It was the only place, where we paid for parking, but we judged the other sites that often were accessible only via gravel roads, as more spectacular and multifaceted. To us, the most thrilling was Pulpit Rock; several lookouts are situated on a tall razor-blade rock, high above the valley. Despite the rails, it was just breath-taking! Somehow it's bizarre; in spite of this national park being called Blue Mountains, you're most of the time standing on a forested high-plateau with spectacular views of canyons and valleys

below. Often, we admired reddish sheer cliff faces of sandstone rock in the upper edge of the valleys. The forests are left so immaculately intact, sometimes you hardly see the river in the valley below.

Less charming than the Blue Mountains themselves, are the villages that serve the tourists. As it's barely 100km to Australia's biggest city Sydney, traffic through the villages in the Blue Mountains, is very dense. Sure enough, it's a recreational area for the city folks, but there are also lots of lorries.



The roads are lined with eateries for the transit traffic, but luckily there is also a good selection of fine dining options, often away from the thoroughfare. Although many Ozzies passionately feed on greasy fast-food, haute-cuisine and fusion-cuisine have found a niche market – even in smaller places.

Blackheath lies on 1,065m of altitude and therefore gets quite chilly in autumn, especially during the nights. So we wore more clothes and the planted European trees in the village, wore their best autumn foliage.

Kiata Country Club: a nice naturist oasis northwest of Sydney

On April 29th, 2018, we reached Sydney's suburb South Maroota, some 70 kilometres northwest of the CBD. Well, Sydney is in fact worlds apart and South Maroota is simply a hamlet with little people, but big plots of vacant land and lots of nature; just perfect to found a naturist ground. That's

exactly what a few energetic and proactive naturists did almost 50 years ago, when they established Kiata Country Club and that's where we stayed.



In the southern Hemisphere, April is autumn (like Oct) and therefore, demand for naturist accommodation is naturally not that big. To our delight, Sydney's friendly naturists were very flexible about our arrival time and even about the arrival day. Someone wrote: "Just travel on in your pace, it's only important we know you're coming sometimes next

week. Here is the entrance code and on the visitors-board we'll note, which rental van is ready for you. Make yourselves at home and somebody will take care of you, as soon we're aware you've arrived". That's just the way we like it. Only a shame that not all resorts and clubs are as flexible!



We stayed in a big renovated onsite-van that had been hollowed out and newly furnished. Our holiday dwelling was situated near Taj Mahal, one of several "cooking temples". The other communal kitchens bear names like sporting bottoms, or covered bottoms. As Taj Mahal is equipped with a little baking oven, we could bake up some crusty continental-style bread daily, sparing us again from the omnipresent toast! Each covered open-air kitchen also has a pleasant outdoor dining-area. Obviously, some birds found it inviting too. Groups of beautiful large Kookaburras (a powerful Australian bird specie), tried so aggressively to grab our food that we didn't feel safe anymore and hid inside. Club members told us, those birds became so nasty, after some thoughtless contemporaries started feeding them!

As common in Australia, anywhere a tad away from town centres, tap-water in our caravan was not drinkable. At Kiata, a tap at the club-house distributes Even in urbanized areas, where tap-prefer the rainwater from their containing chlorine.



drinking water collected from the roof. water is safe to drink, many Aussies roofs, rather than the potable water

Kiata has more than 200 members proper house on the club's ~65 ha permanently. Apart from the house number, many of the dwellings also bear a funny name, like Sydney-bottoms, Orange-bottoms, Kiwi Bottons or "Whatever-bottoms".

and many have a caravan, or even a grounds. A few people live here

We loved to stroll around the extensive network of footpaths between the shady trees. They are mainly Eucalypt or gums respectively, and some have black trunks scarred from a bush fire. Very picturesque are also the two nicely landscaped artificial ponds, one for swimming, and another one functioning as water reservoir.

Even during the week, there was always someone around to chat, especially from the shareholders. Kiata is owned by about three dozen naturists, who invested a fair bit of money, to make the club such a nice one. Shareholders and "ordinary" members alike, help maintaining and improving the facilities. Some less popular, but still important jobs like cleaning toilets, are outsourced to contractors. We loved the generous ~15 person-jacuzzi above the nicely landscaped pool. Furthermore, there are various sports- and playgrounds, plus a big club-house waiting to be used.

Due to the exceptional warm autumn weather, Kiata got unexpectedly bustling over the weekend. There were not only summer-like temperatures of up to 28°C luring, the club organized also a communal meal, as they do regularly, summer and winter. The theme of the dinner party was "flashback food from the 60s and 70s". We didn't expect much and braced ourselves for something deep fried. However, we were very impressed with what the kitchen-team of members produced; it was rather French than Australian flashback food: French onion soup, chicken with apricot sauce, and steamed pear with home-made caramel-cream sauce for dessert; all very delicious!



Excursions: Sydney, Windsor and river ferries

As there isn't a dinner party every weekend, the folks at Kiata need to go shopping once a while. South Maroota, a few kilometres outside the entrance gate, has a tiny grocery store. However, not only the bares find no more than the bare essentials there. For decent shopping, you have to drive to one of three convenient shopping towns, all within a 30 kilometres radius.

Pretty Windsor hasn't got a castle, but an excellent choice of shopping and dining options instead. Furthermore, it is linked to Sydney-Downtown by metro, a ride that takes a bit more than an hour. We know Sydney from our previous trips to Aussie-land. Nevertheless, we really enjoyed visiting the city's mayor attractions once again, especially the harbour-front (around bustling Circular Quay) with the foodie's quarter "The Rocks", the landmarks Harbour Bridge & Opera House and the Botanic Gardens.



some road-work, we couldn't do the round-loop returning via Webbs Creek Ferry. Nevertheless, we still drove (partly on gravel) to the charming village of St. Alban, where we had a good lunch at the historic Settler's Arms Inn.

Well, Kiata's surroundings offer lots of sightseeing possibilities, even the Blue Mountains can be reached in a long day trip. The excellent facilities, the friendly members and the almost summerly autumn temperatures during the days made our stage so pleasant, most of our 12 days we didn't feel the urge to do anything else than just wander around the large club-ground in the buff...



Detouring to Narrabri: neat towns and great nature

Meanwhile, we had been granted a visa-extension, allowing us to stay in Australia for an entire year. So, there was no reason to rush anymore. We quickly drafted a new itinerary, allowing us to drive slowly around Australia; just the way we like it. Now we intended to re-visit most of the fifth continent, except the coast north of Sydney, which we experienced as too urbanised during previous trips.

The southern autumn continued to be exceptionally warm and tempted us to enjoy some more naturist places, before continuing our discoveries. For this reason, we remained in the state of New South Wales (NSW) and ventured further north-west to the interior. Our next stop was at the pretty town of Mudgee. After many indigenous people were massacred here, the town is now a tabu-zone for Aboriginal people. Ironically, like many other accommodations in town, also our Motel had an Aboriginal name. After facing our landlord with a story we had read that Aboriginals had been hunted in many parts of Australia like animals, as the missionaries decided, they must be animals if they don't have a (christian) faith, he confirmed: "sadly, it was about like that!"



The next day, we continued to Gulgong, a peculiar little village that looks almost like time would have stood still for the last century. There were many buildings with old advertisements and shop windows decorated with things of times gone by. The retro-atmosphere was adequately enhanced by a large old-timer parade that passed the village just as we were there.

Coonabarabran, less than two hours north, was our next overnight stop and also the jump off point to visit Warrumbungle national park. The view of the lava-formed landscape at "Whitegum Lookout", was just astonishing! Very remarkable, was also the nearby Siding Rock Observatory, though it just closed as we arrived. Due to the area's extremely clear, dry air, scientists from far and wide flock to this observatory to study the universe. This outback region doesn't have much light pollution and in the coming nights, we perceived how clearly the stars can be seen indeed – even with the naked eye.



The next day, we continued from Coonabarabran to the nearby Sandstone Caves at Pilliga Nature Reserve. We only found these fragile, washed-out rocks thanks to a brochure from the tourist office. As it's a sacred site of the Aboriginal people, it was agreed to develop the nicest section for tourism with a loop-walk, yet without signposting from the main road.

Running Bare: retirement village and naturist hiking paradise

On Mai 13th 2018, we arrived at Running Bare, a naturist village of a different kind. It is situated in New South Wales' interior, some 20 km south of Narrabri and 550 km northwest of Sydney.



The reasons why visitors come to this somehow unique naturist retreat are quite widespread. Being naked is the only common tread. Surely, some might visit just for nude sunbathing and dipping in the pool, but most visitors rather come for indulging in physical exercise, for spending their sunset years, or just for grazing. We were particularly delighted about Running Bare's sheer size: 7,2 km²! This exceeds the combined size of CHM-Monta and Euronat by 36%. Though, unlike the two large naturist meccas on the on the French Atlantic Coast, which attract some 30'000 keen naturists day to day during peak summer, Running Bare is inhabited by only ~30 permanents and probably a maximum of another 30 visitors during the southern summer! During our stage, there were sometimes more marsupials

than naturists present. Running Bare's premises consist predominantly of forest with gum trees, mostly "yellow box". In fact, most of the 720 hectares are untouched nature, made accessible for the benefit of a small, alternative crowd.

Infrastructure like pool, club-house, communal kitchen, BBQs, sports- & playfields, lodgings and pitches, are situated in a large forest glade. Eco-friendly, most of the consumed electricity is generated by big solar panels. Most visitors arrive with their own caravans, but we got one of the cabins. It was small but very nice and the kitchen looked great, though it was equipped “Aussie style only”. That means, the salad could be warmed up in the microwave but there was no bowl to mix it with a dressing. Luckily, the neighbours borrowed a few things like salad bowl, a pot and a broom.



We’re not sure whether the founders of this retreat intended it like that but Running Bare became something like a retirement community for naturists. Many of the about 30 lusty retirees don’t just idle away their time, they rather work hard, helping to improve and maintain their chosen paradise. All we talked to were convinced they live in Australia’s best naturist place. Apart from helping out, the permanent residents often sit together over drinks or food that is generously shared with visitors. Our neighbours Carol and Ross, spoiled us several times with cakes, baked us a damper (Aussie style bread cooked in a fire), and invited us, together with a few other folks, to jacker potatoes around a bonfire. Communal working and living at Running Bare, is certainly enhancing life of the permanent retiree community. However, as we observed also with older folks in Southern Spain, age makes them a bit peculiar, so the community is divided into different sub-communities. However, as visitors it was easy to find contact to everybody, and we had even an unexpected reunion with Chris & Lloyd, a couple we had first met twelve years ago at a naturist club near Perth.



Running Bare is not only popular with pensioners, many (younger) folks visit because of the excellent opportunities for nude hiking. We liked the 12 km long hike along Running Bare’s fence, but also some of the shorter, only 3 – 8 km hikes. The unusual warm autumn weather tempted us to march in the buff several times daily. The warm temperatures were certainly exceptional for the second half of May, the extremely dry climate however, is not. We learned that west of the Great Dividing Ranges, New South Wales receives almost no rain year around that’s why this region is already considered part of the Australian Outback.

For the locals, extreme droughts are a serious problem. Surely, for us na-tourists, it was just pleasant to see the sun daily. Furthermore, we enjoyed watching the many Parrots, Kangaroos and Wallabys who visited daily late afternoon to feed on the irrigated lawns and bushes. To us, it was especially joyful to watch those females who had a joey (baby) in their pouch. Running Bare’s permanent residents on the other hand, were rather frustrated, as the cheeky roos hopp over, or sneak under any fence into the nicely tended gardens, to enjoy a diet enriched with flowers, bushes and bonsai trees.



Excursions around Narrabri: cotton fields and Mt. Kaputar



The nice weather tempted to run bare every day at “Running Bare”, but as we wanted to explore at least some sight of the area, we had to run clad for a day. The small ribbon-built town of Narrabri, about 20km from “Running Bare”, pleased us with its Art Nouveau buildings and naturally, its shops.

May is harvesting season on the surrounding cotton fields. Already the (rather small) harvesting machine displayed at the tourist

office, is quite impressive, because it's not that small at all! We were too late to see the jumbo-harvesters in action, but it was the first time we saw harvested pressed bales of cotton, waiting on the fields to be loaded onto trucks. Those handled by old machinery, were large as a container, whereas newer machines press round bales, similar but much bigger to those with hay. Luckily, we were still able to see a few cotton fields that hadn't been cut yet, as they belonged to a cotton research station.

Narrabri's backdrop is dominated by the impressive Nandewar Ranges. In 45km distance, Mt. Kaputar in the namesake national park dominates the skyline. A narrow steep, partly unsealed road leads to the summit on 1,512m above sea level. Various lookouts offer great views down to the Western Plains. Usually, it's around 10°C cooler on the top than down in the plains. We probably visited shortly before the first snow announced winter, up on the peaks. This certainly has been challenging for the kangaroos and wombats living up there.



Crossing the NSW outback: irrigated fields and remote towns

On May 28th, 2018, we covered our Naurist Uniform with tourist clothing, as our spirit of discovery demanded to be satisfied as well. While driving south-west, we crossed lots of dry country and sighted the first emus of this trip. We

overnighted at Coonamble, where we experienced the peculiarities of country-dining. After a stroll through the small village, we wondered where we should eat, if we wanted to avoid take-aways and pubs. At our motel, they referred us to the Bowling-Club. At first, we were a bit puzzled, but retrospectively we discovered that in smaller Australian places, clubs (not only bowling, also golf, tennis and other sports) often offer decent food. The atmosphere is certainly not suitable for candle light dining, as locals gather in clubs for feeding one-armed bandits, for betting and watching with excitement on sports-tv how much

they lost, for playing lotto or bingo, or simply for having a drink at the bar or eating. Often, a shuttle-bus ensures everyone gets home safely.

As often in the outback, there is a high bridge spanning a normally dry river. Nevertheless, a big sign forbids fishing and jumping from the bridge. During our stage, Castlereagh River was certainly usable to bake sand pies only.

There was plenty of water around Warren, where we passed the next day. The Tiger Bay Wetlands were a scenic change to the otherwise dry desolate countryside. Soon thereafter, we were impressed about a vast area with cotton fields, stretching over several hundred kilometres of irrigated land. All along our way via Condobolin to Hay, our next two overnight-stops, we passed countless road-trains, loaded with the big cotton bales.

For the first time in weeks, it rained a bit in the evening, but it was by far not as much as the locals had hoped for.

We continued along B75 that mutated to the touristy "the long paddock route". The flat, barren land along this road is enhanced with some historic pubs, explanation boards, artwork and nicely landscaped rest-areas. They all remember the paddocks route's importance as stock-route and for the telegraph line. In the pretty town of Deni(liquin), we marvelled at the graceful river named Edward.



Along Murray River: paddle steamers and pretty towns



Soon, we reached the Murray River that marks the natural border between NSW in the north and Victoria to the south. After crossing the border-bridge from Moana, we were already in Echuca. This Victorian town attracts masses of tourists because it functions as departure-port for the much-loved paddle steamer tours and house-boats. Their season seemed to have ceased already, so there were very few boats steaming and sailing up and

down the river. Instead, there was an impressive display of paddle steamers and holiday-house boats moored in the harbour. Beside the piers, a historic replica-village with lonely wooden buildings and horse carriages, stood bored along the street, not understanding why seemingly nobody wanted to picture them at this time of the year.

After two pleasant days in Echuca, we followed the Murray River downstream, which meant in north-westerly direction. There were countless viewpoints as the road skirted the course of the river every now and then. Some particularly pretty sections are away from the main road, like the wetlands and billabongs of Gunbower national park. Lots of tree stumps stick out of the shallow water teeming with water birds. In many sections, the water bodies are covered in a small plant that gives the surface a reddish appearance. At closer inspection, it were myriads of floating green-reddish leaves, only about a centimetre big, resembling fern leaves in shape.



Also very worthwhile, was our sunset-drive around Lake Kangaroo, whereas Lake Charm couldn't quite live up to its name. Everywhere, we observed lots of ibises, herons, cormorants, pelicans and impressive birds of prey.

After overnighing at Swan Hill, we kept following the river, now through pastoral scenery. The Murray River also helps changing the landscape into a green belt along its course. Farming was quite diversified and included orchards of citrus fruits, almonds, stone fruit, hop and lots of vineyards.

Mildura was rather a destination than a stop-over. We loved this charming town of 30'000, not only because of its pleasant centre, but also because it had become a real foodie's heaven. After an Italian born chef made a name by converting Mildura's largest hotel-restaurant into a gastronomic experience, the virus spread to other eateries as well. Nowadays, many of the town's Asian restaurants do not simply serve Chinese, Indian, Malay, Thai or Korean, but sophisticated fusion-cuisine. We tried a few "chef's-choice" surprise menus, which all prove to be real poems! Immigration from overseas; Asia, Europe and South-America, as well as countless young Backpackers on a working holiday from around the globe, has certainly had a positive impact on the Australian cuisine. During the last 30 years, the red continent's population has increased from 16.5 to almost 25 million. Furthermore, many nationals have the chance to obtain a one year working holiday visa (extendable to three years), if they are above 18 and below 31 years of age.



Barossa Valley: how Elizabeth II interfered with our itinerary

After four extremely pleasant days in Mildura, we headed for beautiful Lake Cullulleraine, before reaching the border of the province South Australia (SA). As Australian law forced us to carry our emergency supplies inside our stomachs, we were very well fed. Interstate quarantine regulation between Victoria and South Australia prohibits to carry fruits, vegetables and much more, across the border. The quarantine inspector checked our luggage and assured us that from South Australia, we can bring honey into the Northern Territories. It wasn't long until we provided ourselves again with this delicacy, to which we had given a miss, knowing this would be a critical item to carry along.

Shortly before reaching Renmark, we stopped at the sight of very steep colourful cliffs above a river bend. It was Pike Lagoon on Mundic Creek. Another interesting sight was the Paringa Suspension Bridge from 1927 that spans the Murray River. Just when we arrived, the traffic light turned red and we were to witness how the bridge was lifted up to let two boats pass.

Renmarks location on the Murray is its biggest asset. A pleasant riverside promenade leads to a pier with house boats. In summer, the paddle steamers pass here as well.



For the next two nights, we found a nice motel room in the nearby village of Berri. As the Australian winter was now slowly, but surely bringing down temperatures, we thought it was time to move north and to spare the southern regions for next spring. Though, we hadn't reckoned with the Queen. South Australia celebrates her birthday with a long weekend. Well, it wasn't really her birthday, but the SA Government had decided, June 11 is a good day to celebrate it! Strangely, most Australian States have declared "Queens Birthday" on different days.

For Australian families, every long weekend is a good reason, to go on a short holiday and therefore, every reasonably priced accommodation

along our intended way northwards, had been booked long ago. Finally, we found lodging in Tanunda, the main town of the Barossa Valley. It's so close to Adelaide that many city-folks go there for day trips only. Despite not having intended going there, we enjoyed our stage very much, as the landscape was unexpectedly charming and the dining options surprisingly good!

After two days in the Barossa Valley, we zig zagged via Auburn, Mintaro, Clare and Burra to Jamestown, our last overnight stop, before getting back into the Outback again.

South Australian Outback: more than just desert

On June 12th 2018, we got to Port Augusta. Despite being a bottle-neck, where all east-west and south-north bound traffic has to pass through, we felt Port Augusta doesn't make much effort to attract travellers. Now we set off to cross the red centre towards Darwin 2,700km away. Along the way, there is not much more than desert, every 80-250km a road-house and only a handful of villages. Soon after taking the road junction to the Stuart Highway northwards, we seemed to be heading for a lonely life. Those who have to cross the vastness of the Outback might find it boring. To us tourists however, it was highly interesting! The landscape along our way wasn't an empty desert at all! Sometimes it's flat and barren, sometimes hilly or even rocky, sometimes small bushes are growing, in smaller sections it's almost forested. Very soon, the earth was not grey-brown anymore, but orange-red, just as the rocks. In some sections, there were sandy hills, or even dunes in that same distinguishable red. We were definitely en-route to the Red Centre. In stark contrast to this reddish landscape there were some salt lakes, like the pretty Island Lagoon with its islands.



Unexpected life: high above and under-ground

After 190km we reached already our first destination, which was at the same time the first settlement: Woomera, a

"bustling" Outback town of presently 120 inhabitants, just a few kilometres east of Stuart Highway. We got a room in the only hotel and learned later at the village-museum that Eldo Hotel has purposely been built to host European Scientists. Eldo is an abbreviation for European Launcher Development Organisation, nowadays merged with ESA, the European Space Agency. Whether the missile tests were for civil- or military purposes, European Governments didn't dare to establish a rocket-test launch facility on the European continent for fear any failing devices might fall on their voter's heads... In the Australian Outback however: no problem. Nobody lives there except a few Aboriginals, but until 1967 they didn't have the right to vote, so they didn't count.



Therefore, in 1947 the Australian Government declared 127,000km² (roughly the size of England) as the "Woomera Prohibited Area" a test-ground for missile testing. During the 50ies and 60ies, Woomera was inhabited by up to 7,000 people, most of them working for the test facility, among them many Europeans. Cultural differences between them and Australians had negative impact on their coexistence, especially when they were off-duty. The Australian Air-Force concluded that European personnel don't integrate into the extensive drinking habit in pubs. The solution: "Apartheid". The ELDO Hotel was built for the "well-mannered" ELDO personnel and the village museum didn't hide, why.

Woomera Prohibited Area still serves its purpose as missile test range and the museum has interesting documentation, as well as a large open-air display of rockets, planes and even retrieved missile debris.

Some 80km further away from the highway, we visited Roxby Downs, another village planted into the nothingness. Of course, there was something why this modern town of today 5,000 was built 1987. A wide array of raw materials was discovered and “Olympic Dam Mine” established. In the beginning, it was rather low scale but since 2005, it grew under BHP Billiton to the world’s largest underground mine. In the tourist office’s movie theatre, we were shown a very interesting film about the mining and processing of copper, uranium, silver and gold. Olympic Dam Mine is presently the second largest uranium producer in the world and it still has the largest known single deposit, but the main source of revenue currently is copper.



Where Euros hop and Opals make the money rolling in

Shortly before leaving Woomera, we learned that the Euro is much longer known to Australians than to Europeans! However, on the fifth continent, the Euro is not rolling, it’s hopping. The evolution gave rise to many species of hopping marsupials, from tiny Kultarrs (like hopping mice), over smallish Wallaroos, to slightly bigger Wallabys and to huge red Kangaroos.

The most widespread Kangaroo specie is the Common Wallaroo, also known as Hill Kangaroo. In arid Australia, meaning in the Outback, the most common sub-specie of the Common Wallaroo is known as Euro. So suddenly we realized, we’re surrounded by Euros. No need, searching for the country of milk and honey anymore...

As we returned to Stuart Highway to continue our trip, we eyed a road-sign, indicating the distances to the next places. What a



difference to densely populated Europe. The sign read: Glendambo (only a road-house) 133km, Coober Pedy (a mining village of 1,700) 366km, Cadney Park (a caravan park in the desert) 517km, Marla (another road-house) 597km, and finally Alice Springs (the only real town and only about in Australia’s geographical centre) 1,050km.



It was neither as lonely, nor as boring as this sign suggested. After 40km already, we encountered a busload of tourists at beautiful Lake Hart. This huge salt lake is a real charmer with presently just a film of water on its surface. From a distance, it looked almost as if people were ice-skating. The hilly scenery is even enhanced by the train track along the shore. Unfortunately, the historic Ghan Train can only be seen about once a week. At 2,700 AUD (€ 1,700) from Adelaide to Darwin, there’s hardly demand for additional trains.

Further north, big patches of the red soil along the road appeared to be tarred. At closer inspection, shiny black pebbles covered the red sand. On the other hand, the tarred road was now red, because abundant red sand had been used as base for the tar.

Soon, a road-sign announced the probability of an aircraft using our highway as emergency landing strip. First we concluded, on this 7m wide road only a “Grasshopper” could be landing, but then the road widened to 25m! So we duck our heads and instinctively looked up whether a jumbo-jet was approaching... In order to save a few hundred passengers, an expensive plane, and foremost themselves, the pilots probably wouldn’t hesitate to squash a few lonely motorists...

Before the sun was setting, we reached the opal mining place of Coober Pedy. For passing tourists it’s a high-risk village: those with little time, face the risk of getting separated from their hard earned money in the many opal-jewellery shops, and those with plenty of time, risk falling down into one of the many mining shafts.



Around here, Opal is not mined by big companies, but dug by uncountable “plot holders” the first of whom arrived 1916. As everybody can buy a plot of land and start searching for the precious stone, Coober Pedy still attracts opal prospectors from around the world. In 2018, the 1,700 inhabitants combined of 44 nationalities. Consequently, the town’s only supermarket offers a variety of specialities one wouldn’t expect to find in the Outback. There were high quality German sausages, Black Forest Cake and much more to be found.

Of the world’s commercial supply of opal, 95% originates from Australia, the biggest part from Coober Pedy. As leftover from the mining activities, the landscape is dotted with little conical gravel hills of crushed rock (or mullock) of which the opal has been extracted. Hundreds of small trucks with special equipment to do this, can be seen around this area. Normally, the owners of the small plots drill vertical shafts of up to 30m depth and about 1m in diameter. From the base, horizontal tunnels are dug (up to the neighbour’s fence?) and the excavation material is pumped to the surface. There, it’s washed and crushed in a kind of a drum (rock tumbler) mounted high above a truck. Thereafter, the crushed rocks are then searched manually and with help of fluorescent light for the precious mineral. Finally, the opal is being classified according to quality, brilliance, clarity, variety of colour and variety of pattern.



Cavemen and fences to keep dogs and cats away

Working in a mine is certainly no easy job, but neither is living in this area where summer temperatures regularly reach 40°-50°C and winter nights regularly fall below freezing. The thing to do seemed not only to work, but also to live underground, or in short: cave dwellings. Nowadays, many tourist accommodations are underground too.



Kanku – Breakaways Conservation Park, only 30km from the Opal town, is a perfect day’s outing. As the park is situated on Aboriginal land, a permit is necessary, but it’s easy to buy from the Tourist Office. The well-maintained gravel road was easy to navigate with our 2-wheel drive vehicle, however those with a rental car would be in deep yoghurt, if something happens, as most car-hire companies won’t cover gravel roads. Never mind the dusty

road, the park with its multicoloured mesas, hills and rocks looks almost like an artists-palette. There are hillsides (Breakaways) in white, ochre to reddish brown or even with purple sediments.

A round-loop accesses the park from the so-called dog fence. This 5,614 kilometre long fence was constructed between 1880 and 1885 to prevent dingoes (native dogs) from catching sheep or cattle in the south eastern part of Australia. Normally, the principle of “catch and prey” retains the natural balance. It provides always enough catch without risk that the preyed animals extinct. However, Europeans have introduced so many species that the natural balance turned completely upside down. The dog fence had to be built to protect the introduced sheep. Another huge fence was built to protect native animals like lizards, birds and small marsupials from (introduced) feral cats who kill millions of small animals every night. The most invasive species are cane toads, foxes, rabbits, feral goats, pigs, donkeys, camels, horses and even water buffalos reproduced in such numbers to become a pest.

After three interesting days in Coober Pedy, we continued northwards through the eerie, red landscape, intercepted with some odd flowers that survive in the Outback. After a simple lunch at a roadhouse, we could witness large groups of impressive wedge-tailed eagles feasting on the overrun euros. On lonely Australian roads the circle of life looks often like that: Euros and other Kangaroo species become roadkill as trucks can’t stop for them, and eagles feast so excitedly at the set table in the middle of the road, until they become roadkill too!

We however, had our last South-Australian meal and a last SA overnight stop at Marla roadhouse, and soon crossed the border to the next province.



Northern Territory: camels, cows and trains on the road

On June 19th 2018, we reached the Northern Territory (NT), an extremely sparsely populated province which is partly barren, partly tropic. With a landmass of 1,349,130 km², the NT is 34 times bigger than Switzerland, or ~4 times bigger than Germany.



However, its roughly 240,000 inhabitants equal about those living in the small German town of Freiburg im Breisgau. The clear majority, some 180,000, live in the greater Darwin area on the north-coast, less than 30,000 around Alice Springs in the south of the Territory, and the remaining 30'000 people live distributed over a vast landmass. With almost 30% Aborigines, the Northern Territory has the highest percentage of indigenous population of all Australian states. Their country-wide share dropped to a low 2.7%.

Apart from a rest-area with some explanatory boards and a huge NT logo, you don't realize the border at all. However, along the roadside we noticed more and more hills of totally smooth rock. They almost resemble a little bit famous Uluru/Ayers Rock, but are flatter and smaller. When we reached Erlunda Road-house, it was much busier than any road-house we had seen further down the road. The reason was quite obvious: Erlunda is at the turn-off to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta national park (Ayers Rock+Olgas). Masses of tourists with little time were rushing the 450km between Alice Springs and that national park in their rented cars and camper vans. We, as privileged roving spirits, had seen Ayers Rock, the Olgas and also Kings Canyon (Watarrka) long ago and the memory still lasted. So for now, we decided to rather concentrate on less crowded attractions.

We observed that Erlunda Road-house keeps some emus for the joy of the passing tourist crowds and Stewarts Well, further north has a camel-farm to attract people. As we travel with time, it fell into place that we've seen all sorts of animals. No need to go to farms and bird hides!



As often as wildlife, we encountered road-trains. According to Australian law, every truck with an overall size of more than 36.50m must be marked as "road train". The allowed maximum overall-length and the number of trailers differs from state to state. Here in the Northern Territory, as well as in Western Australia, the maximum is 53.5m and the weight limited is 132 tons - all without the towing vehicle. Typically, a road-train consists of a semitrailer truck, towing three to four trailers. On private roads however, road trains can be more than 100 meters long, and there isn't a weight limit. Just for record breaking, Outback roads had to endure road trains of almost 1.5 kilometres in length, with up to 112 trailers...

In a vast country like Australia, farms are vast too and those surpassing 4,000km², are called "station". Anna Creek Station in South Australia is the biggest. With almost 24,000km² it equals about 60% the landmass of Switzerland. The second biggest accounts for "only" 17,000km² and another 20 stations are still about 10,000km² or bigger. Arid land doesn't feed many animals and with such dimensions, fences are often a luxury. Consequently, big road signs do not only warn of kangaroos but also of cows, camel, sheep and the like. Big animals pose a big risk to motorists. Sadly, cows with their trotters up, are common sight along outback roads.

Winter in the South of Australian, respectively dry season in the north, is mustering / roundup season. On the vast Australian stations, muster of the stock is a lengthy, and also dangerous job, as those animals are rather feral. Normally, they only see people once or maybe twice a year. Nowadays, not only dogs, but also motorcycles, 4WD vehicles and even airplanes and helicopters are used, to muster the cattle. Once the roundup is completed and



the livestock assembled in huge enclosures near a highway or a dusty stock route, they get classified into different groups. The youngest and slimmest are the luckiest, as they get marked and released until the next muster. Others get selected to feed the world as Australian prime steaks, whereas others will get consumed as beef at Australian family tables. The fattest ones are eligible for an overseas trip, as they can survive without food until they reach their destination! There are several mustering enclosures along Stuart Highway. Once, we could watch such a selection process and the loading on road trains.

It was eye striking, how many large road trains loaded with life stock drove northwards and returned empty. In fact, Darwin has the world's biggest port for the somewhat disputed life stock shippings. More than one million cattle and five million sheep are being dispatched annually. Furthermore, additional millions of farm animals get slaughtered and their best pieces exported as "Australian prime meat". We observed that the Australian meat we had been served on the Pacific Islands, always tasted far superior to the quality sold in Australia. It seems, Australians rather eat a big than a good piece of meat.

MacDonnell Ranges: gorgeous from east to west

After overnighiting at Stuarts Well road house, situated 75km south of Alice Springs, we turned off to the East



MacDonnell Ranges. For 80km, the road leads through fascinating landscapes with reddish mountain ranges and valleys. Small gravel roads give access to the nicest areas, a few kilometres off the main road. Though the river beds presently were as dry as they can be, it's obvious that water has carved its way through the rocks. A number of the resulting gorges and gaps have been made accessible to visitors. There are many hiking tracks between these picturesque rock walls and the lucky ones might spot rock wallabys or colourful birds. We marvelled at Emily Gap, Jessie Gap and made a longer hike in Trephina gorge where a tiny water hole was left.

To have more time, we stayed two days at Ross River Homestead. Their cabins look nice from the outside, but are extremely basic, especially considering the price. With 155 \$ it was the most expensive, but by far the most rustic accommodation we had had in Australia (sofar). Nevertheless, we have really fond memories of this place, because here you visit for the great atmosphere and the wonderful surroundings. In the evening, everyone gathered for the communal meals (that weren't great either) and it was very social with log fires in various dining areas within the homestead. It's the interaction with the other guests and the very nice personnel that turns a simple meal into a memorable evening.

Furthermore, Ross River's property is set in such beautiful landscape, you wouldn't need to drive out at all. We were advised of several hikes within the station itself, like to the "Spinx" and the "Great Wall of China" and towards N'Dhala Gorge. All proofed at least equally beautiful to the signposted sights in the national park.



After our stage in the East MacDonnell Ranges we enjoyed some civilisation at Alice Springs, but for easier reading, we first mention our outing to the West MacDonnell Ranges. Naturally, they look pretty similar to their eastern counterparts. Though the western ranges are way more visited and can boost more waterholes and higher peaks, like Mount Sonder (1,380m) and Mount Zeil (1,531m).

We didn't go all the way to Glen Helen Gorge, but turned after about 100km at Ellery Creek Big Hole. As the name suggests, there is a sizeable pond blocking the way in the middle of the gorge. There were a few pretty ducks and a heron swimming, but for humans, the water was too cold now.

Next on our agenda, was the Mac's top attraction: Standley Chasm. As the gorge has meanwhile been given back to the



Aboriginal traditional owners, an entrance fee of \$ 12 was due. The chasm with its impressive high red rock faces is so narrow, it's only illuminated by sunlight during two hours around midday. As we wanted to avoid the busloads of tourists, we chose to be there at 2:30 PM only. The light reflecting from the surroundings still made Standley Chasm (Angkerle Atwatye) shining beautifully. We further enhanced our visit with a strenuous hike above the gorge and an unexpectedly delicious meal at the café-kiosk at the entrance. Our trip to the Western Mac's was completed at Simpsons Gap, another beautiful waterhole in a gorge with multi-layered rocks.

Alice Springs: a real town in the red centre

After ten extremely exciting and varied days through the nuffink, we were definitely ready for a populated island in the midst of the desert. The only “real” town in the red centre is Alice Springs, with almost 30’000 inhabitants almost a city in the wilderness. It’s pretty and modern, but not really a charmer. Strolling through its centre gives you the feeling of being in a small country town rather than in a place with several ten thousand inhabitants. You mainly see shops, restaurants and other commerces, who serve locals and tourists alike. Most of Alice Springs’ population, of whom 17% are Aborigines, live in the outskirts and visit the centre only for working, shopping, leisure and dining. The place developed from a telegraph station for the south-north line, directed mid-19th century by Charles Todd. Many of the towns places are named after him, like the mall and the (presently bone-dry) river.

We left Alice on June 27th, 2018, and joined with our white compact car the Grey Nomads with their large 4x4’s and off-road worthy caravans on their way up north. Apart from road trains, we saw plenty of red termite hills, in size about 10 to 80cm high. At the settlement of Aileron, a couple of giant metallic aboriginal statues decorated the landscape, including a small hill top. The road house, as so many others, prove to have lots of OZ humour. A skeleton holds a sign “shit house this way” just in case you didn’t find your way past the souvenir stall, selling indigenous art. Outside, a giant sculpture of a goanna couple wore bathers. It’s often rather the humour of the owners than the quality of the food that makes the difference between a good and a bad road house.



Around 5 PM, we reached another natural highlight, just a bit off the Stuart Highway: the stone-balls Karlu Karlu/Devils Marbles. Those reddish rock “marbles” are really so big, it looks as if they would have been strewn onto the land by a giant... We admired these spherical or oval shaped rocks that could easily be 6m tall. Now, in the last sunlight, it was a great experience. Not that delightful, however, was the experience we made at the nearby roadhouse. They sold us their last room, which would have been a bargain, if “our” bed hadn’t been occupied by another couple already. As there wasn’t another room, we felt forced to drive on for 100km to Tennant Creek through the dark.

Tennant Creek: a village where Aborigines outnumber settlers

Some 550km north of Alice Springs, we reached the next village: Tennant Creek. More than half of the 3,000 inhabitants are indigenous. The native Australians lived for thousands of years in harmony with nature. By respecting and tending the natural resources, they always found enough food. They have a wealth of precious knowledge about nature. When white settlers arrived in Australia, they initially just ignored the Aborigines and took hold of their land. Later, the white man tried to force the traditional owners of the land into a western lifestyle. Due to their culture with lots of very valuable knowledge about mother nature, but little interest to live a capitalistic life, it’s probably almost impossible that they ever integrate. This rather resulted in alcohol related problems than in a better life for them. Only few integrated into western society, but most still prefer to live their traditional lifestyle in remote communities. Never the less, life has changed, and every community has social workers to encourage education and provide medical care.

At least, Aborigines got much of their land transferred back into their name and nowadays, their most sacred sites are off limits to immigrants and tourists alike. Sadly, most white Australians rate aboriginal culture rather for its value to promote tourism than as something that has to be preserved. Selling boomerangs, Aboriginal paintings and digeridoos, is a good money maker.

We got the impression Aborigines might lack self-confidence. Often, we observed that they almost ran out of the way when we walked towards them on a footpath or in a narrow aisle of a supermarket.

Kundjarra or the Pebbles respectively, 20km northwest of Tennant Creek, is a spiritual site for the Aboriginal people that is partly open to visitors. Globular to oval rocks lay on the hillside in an otherwise flat landscape. They are reminiscent of the Karlu Karlu / Devils Marbles but generally smaller in size. As the Kundjarra boulders have higher significance to the indigenous, than the Karlu Karlu, it's only allowed to watch aforesaid from a distance, but not to climber around them.



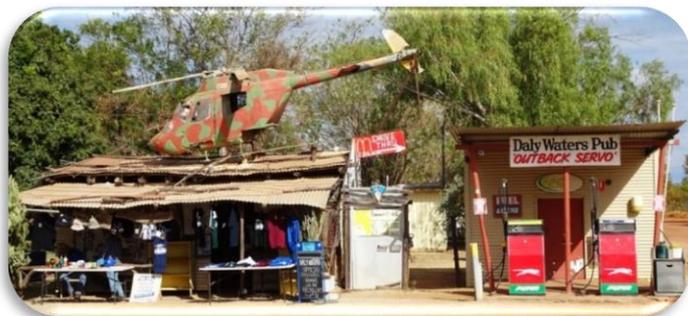
Tennant Creek's abandoned Battery Hill Goldmine has been turned into a museum. In its open-air section, plenty of old mining machinery is on display, among them an old yellow truck. Would you believe? We have pictured that same rusty truck 13 years ago already – with Heinz in front. Comparing the two pictures, Heinz' body aged more visibly. If something is already as old as this truck, a few years more don't matter...

Anyway, after the visit at Battery Hill, we had a picknick at the pretty little dam Lake Mary Ann. There were lots of water birds and wonderful male peacocks with brilliant feathers – it's not known to us whether they were young or old.

Road houses to relax and be entertained

Four hundred kilometres further, passing dozens of road trains, thousands of termite mounds and two road houses, we reached Daly Waters Pub, a few miles off the highway. This is not just another road house, it's an institution! Daly Waters Pub is one of few road houses, where travellers do not only stay because it's convenient, but because they really wanna stay THERE! Nightly entertainment has a long tradition and the changing program includes talented artists and musicians, some of whom toured the world. Furthermore, the pub has a display of thousands of bras, shoes, banknotes, ID cards, car plates and other knickknack left for fun by Daly Water's clients.

However, what's equal to any other lonely road house, is that it's staffed mainly by young working holidayers from all over the world. For those below 31 years of age, it's easy to obtain a one-year-work and travel visa. Who's keen to spend a second, or even third year working and travelling around Australia, must be willing to do jobs, Australians wouldn't do unless they're forced to. Therefore, many highly skilled Europeans and Asians agree to hard pruning work on farms or work in the outback. So if you're lucky, you might find a road house that offers even in the middle of nowhere a few French or Asian delicacies complementing the usual menu of burgers and fish & chips.



Most young people on a working holiday around Australia, seem to be more than happy with their salary, including most Europeans. Australia is one of those countries, where apprenticeships are very uncommon. The mainstream population still considers working for a low salary while learning things, as kind of slavery. Salary-differences between older and younger employees, are by far not as big as in Europe. Probably also therefore, Australia's minimum salaries are among the highest in the world. As of mid-2018, the minimum wage was set to AUD 18,93 per hour. Casual employees, like working holidayers, get furthermore an additional 25% casual loading, to offset holidays, sick-leave, and the insecurity of casual work. This brings the minimum salary of most Backpackers up to AUD 23,66/h (€ 17,75). Not quite all jobs are



paid the minimum salary, some a bit less, others even substantially more. Australia's normal working week consists of 38 hours, but some seasonal jobs come with 60 – 90h/week, making these highly interesting jobs, for those keen to earn their travel bucks quickly! Unfortunately, we've learned also about underpaid Backpackers. This rather seems to affect Asians than Europeans or South Americans. We found the following list with some examples what visitors on a work and travel visa might earn;

<https://www.australia-backpackersguide.com/backpacker-jobs-salaries-australia/>.

Only 22km north of Alice Springs, we had crossed the tropic of Capricorn, which theoretically marks the beginning of the tropic region where there are only two seasons: wet and dry. Surely, the climate didn't feel warmer and more humid quite suddenly. Meanwhile, we were 900km north of this invisible line and at last it started to feel tropic. In Alice Springs, daytime temperatures were around 15-19°C and at night they dropped close to zero or even below. Up here however, daytime temperatures rose to respectable 30-34°C and at night they didn't fall below 16°C anymore. Imagine, you could escape from the central European winter into the tropics with an "easy 10 hours drive" over lonely roads... From central Australia you can easily do so, and especially from further south, many do. Just a shame that mossies like this tropical climate too.

Only 100km north of Daly Waters, another "must-see" was waiting: the oasis of Mataranka, with its thermal pool in Eley national park. We took a simple motel room at Mataranka Homestead from where the 33°C pool was only a few hundred metres away. The hot spring feeds not only the pool but continues into Roper River that flows year around. Consequently, the river banks have quite lush vegetation with Cabbage Palms, Paperbark Gumtrees and many others. As it's not all that far to the north coast anymore, the odd saltwater crocodile makes its journey up here during the wet season. Despite being regularly re-settled by national park rangers, part of the riverbank is closed for hiking on security reason.



The village of Katherine is only 110km further north, but we stopped again for the night. The bridge spanning Katherine River here, is a good example how much water levels can rise during wet season. Right now, it flowed more than 20m below the bridge, but after exceptional rains, it gets flooded once a while, as happened 1998.



The prices for accommodation indicated, it was school holiday. After an intense six weeks period of travelling, we needed a holiday within our holiday as well. It goes without saying that it suited us perfectly that we found several naturist places just a little south of Darwin, only 300km further north.

BRUJUL: unexpected encounters in a new nudist retreat

On July 3rd, we made it almost to Australia's northernmost tip. Some 40 kilometres south of Darwin, we took a few turnoffs and five kilometres further, we reached our destination: **BRUJUL**, a new and welcoming nudist retreat in Australia's tropical climate zone.



Bruce & Julie, BRUJUL's owners are keen naturists themselves and run their little paradise with devotion. Julie gave us a very warm welcome and showed us the new, bright cabin, we've arranged beforehand. However, when Heinz asked, whether the kitchen really doesn't come with hotplates, he must have sounded very upset! Our landlords decided that Swiss Na-Tourists probably can't deal with a fully equipped Aussie style kitchen, consisting of microwave and BBQ, but no hotplates! So, the very next day, Bruce & Julie brought us a couple of brand new hotplates and told us, they've decided to equip all cabins likewise. Honestly, BRUJUL's studios are extraordinarily well equipped, even the kitchen. Most locals either use the BBQ, or Microwave a take-away meal, while on holiday. If Aussies cook properly, it's normally for a big group of friends, and the kitchen we had, was equipped with a few sophisticated food processors.

BRUJUL is a lively naturist ground – for Australian standard! 60 to 80 guests are plenty hereabout. It's a place, where many retired Australian naturists annually spend a few months to escape the southern winter. Here around Darwin, on the other hand, they only know wet and dry season. The dry lasts from about May to October and is

characterized by sunny days with temperatures around 30° to 35°C. In comparison, wintering in Southern Spain is actually fridge-like only!

At BRUJUL, many of the winter escapees meet regularly in the semi-open club-house for happy hour and games around sunset. However, as we're very happy without happy hour, we rather went wildlife- and nature watching. Regularly, we strolled along the border fence track, which is less than a kilometre-long. As this is rather short, we normally made several laps. There was always something to see. We were smitten by the many screw palms, a pandanus specie whose lance-shaped leaves grow in a cork-screw line. After the old leaves dried off, the stem appears like a giant screw.

Sure enough, we were also spoiled with regular wildlife spotting. We already got used to most Australian naturist places almost warranting sightings of kangaroos and different birds, including colourful parrots. However, at BRUJUL, such ordinary encounters were dwarfed by two creatures we hadn't met before on a naturist ground: a freshy and a salty! As unbelievable as it sounds, several times we almost tipped over a small crocodile, basking well camouflaged on the track. In Australia, nobody opts to flight, just because of a small young crocodile. Admittedly, everybody runs, but just to grab the camera! The Aussies told us that one was probably a freshwater- and another one a saltwater crocodile. However, both were so small, we had much more respect from the barking dogs of some permanent tenants. One croc must have felt exactly the same: it opted to take flight as fast as it could, after another naturist arrived not only with her camera, but also with her two toy poodles!



We've enjoyed ten very relaxing days at our nice, motel style unit at BRUJUL. The uncountable Australian naturists who recommended us this place, were absolutely right: already the pleasant personality of the owners Bruce & Julie, make a visit very worthwhile. They're both naturists by heart and do the upmost they can to keep their visitors happy. A new, bigger pool is already initialized. Once a while, they organize also special events like nude golf tournaments or nude boat tours. We can't promise croc sightings at BRUJUL. However, within about one hours drive, there is a wide selection of wetland boat tours, where croc sightings are (almost) warranted. There you will meet the really big mates you wouldn't like to see at your naturist-ground!

Also Darwin, the northern beaches or Litchfield national park, can easily be visited in a day's outing from BRUJUL. However, as we travel with lots of time, we postponed those sights for our onward journey.

Northern Territory's wetlands: almost like a "water zoo"

As already mentioned, during the wet season, it's extremely hot in the north of the Northern Territory. It gets extremely humid and rains daily, maybe only for an hour but then, as if the sky would be a giant tap. This results in vast areas of land being inundated and many roads have to close. Unless there's a cyclone, life in Darwin remains still reasonably pleasant. However, travelling around the far north of the Territory can become "mission impossible"!

Land that is regularly affected by flooding is called wetland, and where some water remains year around, it develops a special eco system. Wetlands host an abundance of wildlife; fish, birds, small to large predators and their potential prey. Between Darwin and Kakadu national park, there are numerous wetlands. On many of their water bodies, cruises are offered to let tourists have a closer look at animals that otherwise would shy away or consider making a meal of you. On previous visits to Australia, we had been delighted by boat-tours on the famous Yellow waters at Kakadu NP. This time, we chose a wetland-cruise on Corroboree Billabong and were not disappointed.



Ironically, just before boarding we were greeted by a big croc sunbathing near the pier. A sign nearby read: "just come closer and we can have lunch together...". That's why we only came for the sunset cruise. We saw lots of big crocodiles indeed, salties (up to 8m) and the smaller freshies (up to 3m and normally harmless to humans). The boatman that happened to be a lady, told us, we should be safe from salties too, as

long as we stay well inside the boat. Fish are normally not visible but if a school of fish passed by, their movement was visible on the water surface and attracted lots of birds who tried to fetch the “scholars” as dinner. Among those birds we saw in big numbers, were Darter, Intermediate Egret, white bellied sea-eagles, cormorants, Nankeen night herons and the big black & white stork: Jabiru.



After staying overnight at Corroboree Park Tavern, we visited a few billabongs along our way to Darwin. Especially delightful was the Leaning Tree Lagoon, of which the water surface was dotted with snowflake lilies. Again, it was teeming with waterbirds, like ibises, ducks and herons. Crocs were only visible on the danger-signs. That doesn't mean, there were none – we learned that if you see one crocodile, there are probably 10 eyeing you!



Darwin: a modern city on the top end



On July 14, 2018, we arrived in Darwin, where we moved into a nice hotel at the city edge. With 130,000 people, it's not such a big town by global standards. However, for Northern Territory standard, Darwin is a real city and home to more than half of the Territory's population, or if you include a 50km radius, it's even ~80%. Nowadays, the towns skyline looks quite impressive. The many new buildings give the impression of a very urbanized holiday resort. Among Australian retirees from the southern megapolises, it's popular to invest their children's inheritance in a second home or holiday apartment somewhere with a milder climate, like northern Queensland or equally tropical Darwin.

The town centre is modern and functional but, on its outskirts, Darwin is blessed with large green parklands and beautiful beaches. Many boast nice multicoloured rock-faces behind vast sandy beaches, though swimming is unfortunately anything else than safe. During wet seasons, swimming is prohibited due to the abundance of deadly box-jellyfish, and during the dry, it's still recommended to wear protective clothing like neoprene, as a few of the box-jellyfish could still be present. If this is not enough thrill, crocs are present year around to snack on thrill-seekers. Somebody told us that if a saltwater crocodile is spotted on a popular beach, it's being re-located to protect dogs. Well, we rather think the government wants to protect tax-paying bipeds than their pets. We read that only around Darwin, more than 400 protected crocs have been re-located during the first 6 months of 2018.

During the wet season, when water-levels rise that several rivers may become one, crocs migrate for hundreds of kilometres and some ended up almost as far south as Brisbane. Annually, before re-opening national parks in dry season, park rangers search for salties and relocate them to the (northern) regions, where they're meant to be, according to humans. Apart from implementing some construction measures to improve croc-safety in popular national parks, many natural and artificial bathing lakes and dam-protected lagoons offer unalloyed bathing fun.



Snakes, sharks, crocs, jellyfish, spiders etc.: the prevaricated truth

While buying our Australian SIM-card, the vender sympathetically said: “poor guys, you’re from refugee-flooded Europe. Germany is already lost, you have to forget it!” Well, while visiting Germany, we hardly noticed any refugees. This guy probably just took some exaggerated news coverage at face value!

On the other hand, the European press tends to exaggerate the deadly treats, originating from the Australian wildlife. We heard about Europeans who would never dare to visit Australia, because of fear of getting bitten by deadly snakes or spiders or getting snacked by sharks or crocs! Unquestionably, fatal snake and spider bites happen, and also jellyfish pose a risk, as people are occasionally being attacked by sharks or crocodiles. However, it’s all relative.



According to statistics, Australia suffers annually two fatalities caused by snakes, less than two by crocodiles, one by sharks, not even one by jellyfish and less than one every 25 years by spiders. By the way: (even Australia wide) bee and wasp stings cause a bigger death toll than snake bites, and worldwide, falling coconuts cause fifteen times more fatalities than sharks.

The unique wildlife should rather be a reason to visit Australia than an excuse not to. The biggest risks come from things you might not worry about too much; road-accidents claim in Australia 1,200 lives/annually, Alcohol 6,000/annually and smoking 15,500/annually. To be on the safe side during your stage in Australia, it might be sensible to refrain from potentially deadly traps like driving cars, crossing roads, drinking alcohol, smoking or sunbathing on palm-fringed beaches!

Litchfield National Park: Lido or nature reserve?

Kakadu- and Litchfield national parks, are certainly the top end’s main tourist draws. Kakadu attracts hordes of foreigners and interstate visitors, who want to meet the really big crocodiles. Litchfield on the other hand, lures Darwin’s city-folks and tourists alike, because of its many swimming holes that are kept crocodile-free.

Top End naturist retreat, which is described below, was a perfect base for a day-trip. As we had no objection to drive a 12km unsealed section, we could do a convenient 200km round-loop, sparing us about 120km of detour.



We started our discovery of Litchfield national park at the abandoned Bamboo Creek tin-mine, an attraction that doesn’t stand for Litchfield NP, but is within its boundaries. The mine closed down 1908, after only two years of operation. Back then, wet season road access was even more limited than nowadays, and after the mine shafts got flooded, the lessees decided it was too much hassle for too little revenue.

Litchfield’s highlights are waterfalls and water holes. Well, to us Swiss, some of the waterfalls are not all that impressive, especially now in dry-season. However, Wangi- and Tolmer Falls impressed with their high drops, framed by beautiful reddish rock cliffs. There were many overly popular waterholes that offered cooling from the scorching heat. Totally different, was the scenery at Tabletop Swamp! A quiet wetland-billabong which we had all to ourselves. There were just birds, paperbark-trees in the water, little flowers between reed and lots of peace and quiet.



Quite unusual, were the termite mounds that covered a vast field and were made accessible to tourists. Here was a large concentration of “Magnetic Termite mounds”. They are up to two metres in high, slender and look like old tomb stones. The Magnetic termites who are the architects and builders of these “ant sky scrapers” build them always north-south facing, to have the optimum temperature inside, without air-conditioning and heating!

More widespread are the Cathedral Termites, also known as

Spinifex Termites. Their architects seem to have different ideas and tend to aim higher. Their individually shaped cathedral mounds may reach up to six metres and have quite a bold star-shaped base that's thinning out towards the top. Also those termite mounds have a very refined architecture that warrants a steady temperature of about 25°C.... Cathedral Termite mounds are quite common in the Northern Territory. In the south, they were rather smallish and the further north we came, the higher they grew up to the sky. Seeing the small size of the termites and the giant size of their edifices dwarfs the human's ability to build skyscrapers (with all sorts of sophisticated equipment)!

Top End Naturist Recreation Retreat: big and full of surprises

For a small Australian town like Darwin, it's amazing that there is enough demand for two naturist grounds. The newer: BRUJUL, we've already described above. Now, we spent also 10 days at the long established one: TENRR. Both prove popular among grey nomads escaping winter. Both have their pros and cons, but for those with a rental car, TENRR is probably the better option, as it's accessible via sealed roads all the way. Though the authorities have approved to seal the road to BRUJUL, it's another story, by when the bitumen is rolled out.

On July 18th, we've continued from Darwin 60 km southwards to TENRR, Top End Naturist Recreation Retreat respectively, how it's named in full! Never mind the long place name, we had been here already long ago, and we came back, because we loved the long nude hikes within this naturist ground with a long history.



Well, we were given the same cabin we had stayed in 12 years ago, and it was still in good nick. Only the bed was too soft. No worries, we've just removed the second mattress and stored it below the bed. Now, we had a more comfortable, healthy bed, as common all-over Australia nowadays. During our last stages, soft beds and mattresses were in fashion. To our dismay, landlords often invested a fortune, to make their soft beds even softer! Luckily, those times are gone.

With some 60 – 80 naturists present, TENRR is among Australia's most popular naturist grounds, at least during the dry season. During the wet it's probably a pretty lonely affair, if it's open at all. However, now in July, the place attracted many retired naturists from the southern metropolises, who spent a big part of the southern winter here. Additionally, there were a few "younger" southerners, seeking a warm holiday in the sun. Some just prefer lazing around their caravan or cabin, but most joined the regular animations and social gatherings like aqua-gym, darts, games, happy hour or BYO communal dinners. Well BYO communal dinners is an Australian uniqueness, where everybody brings and eats its own food, not sharing it!

To us, TENRR's biggest assets are the nude hiking trails. The 100-hectare yard with only ~40 pitches offers an excellent network of hiking trails between bushes and trees. The longest one follows more or less the border-fence and adds up to an impressive 4 kilometres. However, together with many worthwhile detours, our naked round-loops accumulated more often than not, rather to 8 kilometres!

The nude hikes at Top End Naturist are not only healthy, they lead through a very diverse landscape with unique flora, and an extremely hard-working fauna! Quite a few impressive termite mounds, built by compass- and cathedral-termites, are dotted near the walking paths. The biggest of these termite-built skyscrapers are taller than 5 meters.

TENRR's fauna has more to offer than just tiny ants. Also here, we were spoiled with more than parrots and kangaroos! Several times, we've spotted a Pacific Baza, a beautiful bird of prey, of the subspecies' falcon. Our highlights however, were two animals so well camouflaged, we would never have seen them on their trees, if some friendly fellow naturists wouldn't have pointed them out: Two frilled neck lizards, an adult and a young. We had always hoped to encounter this



impressive lizard somewhere in Australia, and here, we were finally lucky. As well camouflaged a frilled necked lizard is, as reliable it can hang around the same trunk, once it found the tree of its dreams. The couple, who had their caravan near the two frilled neck lizards told us, they had seen the bigger one on the same trunk for more than two weeks now. Even the regular visits of curious humans like us, didn't chase those cute animals away.

TENRR is a well-equipped, popular place. Jean & Garry, who founded it 22 years ago, know what naturists are looking for. Apart from nude hiking, the place offers also a nice swimming pool with lots of shade to linger around (at 35°C, nobody looks for full exposure to the sun), a garden chessboard, sportsgrounds, a generous clubhouse and more. Only some contemporary things like recycling containers, or payment any other than cash, are missing. No worries; just bring a wheelbarrow full of silver coins. TENRR is a very nice place, it's worth every cent indeed!

Western Australia: the gem of the fifth continent

Next on the agenda was Western Australia (WA), our firm favourite on the red continent. WA is a vast, mainly barren province with lots of lonely country roads, though traffic has increased since our last visit!

With a landmass of 2,529,880 km², WA is about 7 times bigger than Germany, or 61 times bigger than Switzerland respectively. It's entire population of roughly 2.6 million equals only about Hamburg's agglomeration. Of those (WA-ers, not Hamburgers), more than 2 Million live in the capital Perth. Most of the other 600,000 people live in the "relatively" small south-western corner, between Perth and Esperance (ca. 0.2 million km²). Therefore, less than 100,000 inhabitants are dotted over a vast landmass of more than 2,3 million km².



It's 4,500 km from Darwin via Broome and from there along the west-coast down to Perth. Before taking the turn-off towards Western Australia, we had to drive back to Katherine, 300 km south of Darwin. From there, it was more than 500 kilometres to Western Australia. We overnighted at the 250-soul village of Timber Creek (NT), the only sizable settlement in between. It was anything else than a dull drive. Still in the Northern Territory, the landscape became more and more spectacular, especially around Gregory NP. The reddish rockfaces and the first bottle trees were forerunners to Western Australia, to which we crossed the border 50 km east of Kununurra.



Now our WA adventure started: even more lonely roads, even fewer settlements or villages. Nothing in between, except spectacular land- and seascapes with overwhelming flora and fauna. Even the distances between roadhouses stretched, compared to Stuart Highway, the north-south connection. Here, in Western Australia, sometimes there wasn't a roadhouse for 300km!

Kununurra: gateway to the Kimberley's

With 4,500 inhabitants, Kununurra is by far the largest town in this vast area. It's situated more than 1,000 road kilometres from the next similarly "bustling" town in Western Australia. Kununurra developed with the damming of Ord River between 1959-72, as part of a large irrigation scheme. Thereby, 750 km² of land was flooded and Lake Argyle, a picturesque lake came into being. The former hill-tops became pretty islands. Today, the lake produces electricity and feeds some 28,000 ha of productive agricultural land. Cultivation of sandalwood, vegetable and tropical fruit has become a big industry. Other large employers are a diamond mine and tourism.



The beauty of the craggy reddish mountain ranges with their gorges, make the Kimberley Region distinctively different from the rest of Australia. The number of visitors is probably only limited due to its remote location. Real adventure seekers however, are attracted just by that! The challenging dusty 660km Gibb River Road to Derby, is only recommended for 4x4 off-roaders. It's popular with keen campers, as there are almost no facilities along this spectacular drive.



Along the sealed main road, but again only accessible by 4x4 or tours, are the spectacular Bungle Bungles. We've visited this manifold of small striped sand stone hills, nicknamed "beehive cones", back in 1992 by plane, helicopter and also 4-wheel-drive tour. It wasn't cheap then, but if you see the prices now, a real bargain!

Similar, though smaller rock formations than in the Bungle Bungles exist also at Keep River national park (NT) and some even closer to Kununurra, at Mirima national park. Both are accessible by unsealed 2-wheel drive roads, and the latter even by foot from the village – at least, if it isn't as hot as it was during our stage.

Impressive, almost areal views are to be enjoyed, if you drive up to Wyndham. The "five river lookout" high above a cliff, offers fantastic 360° views down to impossibly colourful flood plains. At this time, the 60km side-trip was a time-consuming stretch with lots of road work and rough gravel sections. However, the many stops at the traffic lights allowed us to marvel at the giant construction machinery and the countless bottle trees.

Westwards to the coast: much more than just lonely road

From Wyndham, we attempted one of the loneliest stretches of road (because so many drove the even more remote Gibb River Road?). It was more than 1,000km to Derby, with only two very little villages in between. Also here, the drive was anything else than boring!

Sometimes, the landscape was vast and plain, but again and again adorned with hills and mesas. We stopped many times for fascinating brownish to reddish, often roundish rock formations, but also for overhanging cliffs or unusual limestones. Some areas were dotted by uncountable big termite hills, again in different shapes than the ones we had seen previously. Parrots and other bird species were widespread where there were bigger trees or rivers. Creeks and riverbeds are many. Often, the road led to floodways, straight through river beds, because most are dry for the biggest part of the year.



Now, beginning of August, was the middle of the cooler dry season. However, during wet season, many of the often several hundred metres wide rivers swell to more than 20 metres. Only if you had an amphibious vehicle, you could pass those road sections... More and more floodways are therefore replaced by long bridges, spanning normally dry river beds. Many dry rivers maintain some waterholes, which attract every animal that knows about it, native or not! Indian cows for instance, can often be seen in Australia's arid tropical north.

Almost all of the few tourists to this area, are attracted by Geikie Gorge (a national park), carved out by Fitzroy River. It is one of only few river courses in the Kimberleys that doesn't dry out in the dry. The national park dept. takes advantage of this fact by running boat tours year around. Despite lasting only for an hour, we thoroughly enjoyed this cruise through the limestone gorge. It's amazing to see what the power of water has carved into this currently very barren and dry area. The upper, now black part of the cliff, is diagonally rutted, whereas the lower parts that get the flood water, are of a creamy white, full of holes and crevices. Those provide hiding for a variety of animals, among them many freshwater crocodiles. As the boat glided past the rocks, we saw quite a big number of "freshies" basking in the morning sun.



Leaving the small village of Fitzroy Crossing westwards, we witnessed another type of “Australian Monsters”. We had just stopped beside the road to have a closer look at some big termite mounds. Then a lead-car with flashing lights and a warning sign appeared: Over size. It was followed by two such cars and then: four road trains hauled parts of several huge mining dump trucks. The vehicle that carried the engine and tyres had 54 wheels itself! Impressive were also the road trains that carried the mining dump truck’s beds. Their load exceeded the already over-wide low platform trailer on both sides by abt. another two metres.



Derby: it's all about boab trees



The closer we got to Derby, the more rest areas were situated around age-old bellied boab trees. At most road side stops there is no rubbish bin. Instead, big panels indicate how far east- and westbound you have to drive to find one. To facilitate a roadside pick-nick, there was never much more than 220km between two bins!

After two nights in the outback, one at a road house and another at Fitzroy Crossing, we felt like coming back to civilisation, when we reached the village of Derby. In fact, it's only a small place with 3,300 inhabitants, of which quite a big proportion lives spread out in Aboriginal communities and stations.

Derby is situated at the bottom of King Sound, which exposes lots of sandbars at low tide. There are also numerous inland wetlands that serve as great habitat for waterfowls and wildlife in general. Apart from some more familiar species like sandpipers, ducks and ibises, we were also surrounded by colourful, opalescent Rainbow Honey Eaters.



Like Kununurra, also Derby likes to boost its low key tourism around a logo of boab trees. There were not only many boab trees planted, those grown by Mother Nature were even given the status of a protected species. If a bottle-tree interferes with a road project, here, the road has to go around the tree!

Boab trees are quite special in many ways. Though related to the African and Madagascan *Adansonia* species, the Australian bottle trees rarely grow higher than 15m. The stem is slender when young but gets swollen, bulbous and often hollow when old. Inside, they can store water for the dry season. Some boab trees are assumed to be 1,500 years old. Their bark is smooth and shiny, grey or copper in colour. Branches are short and strong and often grow twisted. Before the wet season starts, boabs sprout leaves and big white flowers. The leaves are shed during the dry season and that's when the fruits are ripe. It's a hairy nut that looks like a giant kiwi-fruit. Aboriginal people know how to prepare not only those fruits, but several other parts of the boab tree to be eaten.



During colonial times, the indigenous people got to know an unpleasant aspect of boab trees. The first white settlers often misused the Aboriginals as slaves and in one of Derby's largest boab trees, up to 14 people were locked into the hollow stem that was used as prison cell. Luckily, things have changed in the meantime – if only a little bit. We got the impression that Western Australian

Aboriginals are more likely to integrate into the western lifestyle than those from further east. Here, they seem to be wealthier and we think, its not only because WA awarded better compensation payments for their land. Here, its not uncommon to see them working and wearing modern style clothes. Just as every white Aussie, also Aborigines are fond of fish & chips and know where to get the freshest fish straight out of the deep-fryer...

Broome's Cable Beach: naturism versus mass-tourism

On August 7th 2018, we reached Broome, a rather unappealing town of 14,000 inhabitants, plus season-dependant, thousands of tourists. The town consists of a cluster of houses and an airport-runway literally through the centre. Broome rose to fame thanks to its pleasant dry-season weather, conveniently taking place during the southern winter. Furthermore, there are fantastic endless sandy beaches with turquoise waters teeming with fish. The most famous is Cable Beach. Its "ordinary section" stretches 5km from the main access to the south. There are Life-savers and you can hire sunbeds and sun shades.

More famous, are the remaining 17km to the north that are declared "clothes optional". Prior to our arrival, we were already aware that the status of Cable Beach's clothes optional section had somehow become disputed, due to the arrival of "mass tourism" in Broome. The up-side first: North of the rocks, Cable Beach is still officially declared as clothes optional. The share of naturists, and the overall vibe on the nudist section however, changed dramatically. During our first stage at Broome 25 years ago, the village attracted a predominantly alternative crowd, inhabitants and visitors alike. Strong coffee, naturism and other forms of alternative lifestyles, were just an integrated and inseparable part of Broome. A few hundred meters north of the rocks, naturism was the norm, and tourism was slowly developing, attracting predominantly folks visiting for the alternative vibe. Nearly half of the people, who stayed at the same backpacker's place where we did, were regularly seen on the beach without a stitch on.

Only on the 17 km long "cloth optional" section, it's allowed to bring the car, but not to the small patrolled beach.

Therefore, the real Aussies didn't have an option: they had to go to the nudist beach, although most of them could hardly bear it that others bared it all. During our visit 12 years ago, we've noticed that more and more 4WD vehicles were driving down to the beach. However, back then, naturism was still popular at cable beach and respected by non-naturists. Surely, the odd textiles tried to get some shots of the nudes from the hiding of their cars. Once, Brigitte reconciled that a lady tried to capture the two of us secretly. Brigitte jumped in front of her and said: "We don't have a problem being pictured naked, but please don't do it hidden": The lady was so much taken aback, she didn't take her unexpected opportunity!

Whereas Cable Beach in the past, was dominated by grey nomads, backpackers and other real travellers, Australians and foreigners alike, nowadays it's Joe Sixpack with his family seeking "sun, fun and nothing to do". Naturally, they might like to peek at some nudes, but would never ever dare to bare it all! As the "clothes optional beach" is now predominantly occupied by textiles with their 4WD vehicles, only a few die-hard naturists still dare to bare it all. Most who do, hide close to the dunes, but rarely somebody goes for nude hikes along the beach. Luckily, high tide is a big blessing to naturists. Cable Beach is most beautiful at high tide, when passage of the rocks at the entrance is not possible with vehicles. Fortunately, the textile 4WD cowboys have forgotten how to walk to the beach; in contrast to the naturists, who then enjoy the beautiful beach all by themselves and also go on beach walks ...

Cable Beach is also famous for its sunsets and camel rides along the beach. An Australian naturist couple told us, they were asked to move further north, or to cover up while the camel trains pass, to protect school children from seeing naked people. However, during our stage, this was no problem at all, as only European children had summer leave. They're used



to see naked people, as European parents rather let their infants roam around naked, than telling them, how sinful it is to do so, and Continental European youths are used to nudity from watching tv or visiting saunas!

Surely, Broome bares also some beauty besides Cable Beach. Whilst sightseeing, Gantheaume Point south of Broome

delighted us with wonderful eroded rock formations of layered sandstone. From a lookout below the lighthouse, we saw the first migrating whales on this coast, which was really spectacular.

Very pleasant, was also the port with its long jetty. It's not a harbour you visit for its boats, but for its scenic setting. To one side, there are sandstone formations similar to those at Gantheaume Point, and to the other, there is a red-sand beach at the foot of equally red dunes that contrast beautifully with the few mangroves and the turquoise waters.



Port Hedland: a pleasant town with a huge iron-ore port

Port Hedland, our next destination, was more than 600 km away. As the landscape was mostly flat, the road was often dead straight for dozens of kilometres. There were two roadhouses along the way: Sandfire and Pardoo. We used one for lunch, and one for dinner and overnighing. Our room in a metal container accommodation (like shipping container) was tiny and neither cheap, nor clean, but according to reviews, still way better than the one at the other roadhouse!

The further west we got, the more bushes and flowers in bloom lined the roadside. Already before reaching the town centre, Port Hedland welcomed us with a superb observation terrace on a bridge, giving unhindered views to the industrial activities. Eye striking were Rio Tinto's white piles of salt, currently being re-arranged by caterpillars and loaded onto special three-trailer road trains. The 20-30m high hills of extracted salt are predominantly used for industrial purposes, only a fraction will end up as table salt.



The surrounding salt fields that gleamed in different colours, were not less impressive.

Just as we attempted to leave the viewpoint, a train rolled in, competing for attention. It wasn't one of these "dwarf trains", as common in Europe. It was a 2.640 km long iron-ore train with 248 small wagons and 4 locomotives. The iron ore is exploited and crushed to coarse sand at the mine near Newman, 426 rail-kilometres away. To each carriage, 128 tons of iron ore are loaded, so each train transports almost 32,000 tons. Nowadays, the trains are remote-controlled and monitored from an operation centre in Perth.

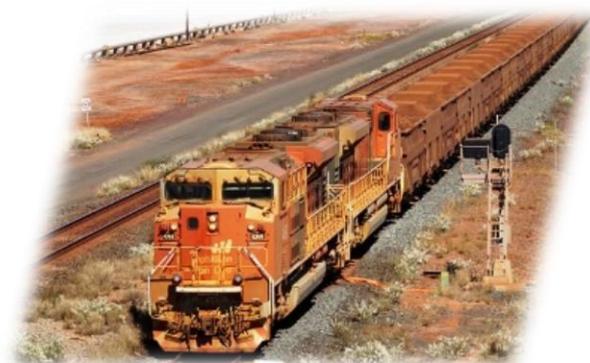
BHP Billiton, the biggest operator, runs more than 20 of those heavy-load trains daily. Two smaller companies, Fortescue and Roy Hill run about the same number of such huge trains together.

To limit the handling, the content of the wagons is automatically tipped out onto wide conveyor belts that feed the iron ore directly into the vessels at the purposely built harbour. For interested contemporaries, tours can be booked through the tourist office and there are several viewing platforms on the waterfront open to the public. From there, we observed how pilot boats navigate the large cargo ships in or out of the harbour, and to the loading berths.

As the iron-ore trains arrive continuously, there were always 14 vessels on standby near the shore. Watching an almost 3km long iron ore train coming in from the first to the last wagon, is already impressive. Knowing that the load of up to

10 such trains goes into one single vessel, is even more so! Each of those giant bulk carriers is up to 330m long and capable of holding 300,000 tons of ore (afloat). Simultaneously, 8 vessels can be loaded only on the berths of BHP Billiton, and this takes about 30-36 hours. Altogether, about 500 mega-tons of iron ore is shipped annually from Port Hedland and most of it goes to China.

If those figures impress, it might be interesting to know that despite Port Hedland being the world leading iron ore despatch harbour, it is only one among many iron ore and other raw material ports in Australia. From the global iron ore production, 37% comes from Western Australia, which is 97% of Australian iron ore export.



Even though the town of Port Hedland isn't really a beauty queen, it takes advantage of its seafront location and pleases locals and visitors alike with a beautifully landscaped Esplanade. A big part of the town's 14,000 inhabitants live in the satellite town of South Hedlands, where we found a nice motel, ideally situated next to restaurants and a shopping centre.

Pretty Pool Clothing Optional Beach: really pretty



Also Port Hedland spoiled us with very pleasant temperatures of around 33°C. So, it happened naturally that we went to the local naturist beach. Already from far away, "Pretty Pool" beach with its tidal sandbars, is a feast for the eyes. The official clothes optional section is particularly picturesque. The beautiful scenery is enhanced by the changing tides. You see mangroves, sand dunes, oyster covered rock-arches, red, porous rock and last but not least, a lovely wide sandy beach. Pure nature; just perfect for naturists. Alone for this beautiful beach it is worth mutating to nudists. Despite the pleasant temperatures, we had the beach four August days almost to ourselves. The locals consider it only warm enough for the beach, once the mercury rised to 40° - 45°C. Only one other tourist couple enjoyed the idyll of this beautiful stretch of sand as well.

Point Samson: a coastal village with a picturesque setting

On August 22nd, 2018, we continued towards Dampier/Karratha. We didn't stop that many times along the way but made a side trip to Point Samson. The namesake village at the head of this peninsula delighted us so much, we spontaneously asked for accommodation, after spotting a B&B sign. Our first impression prove right and in the end, we based ourselves there for four days. Point Samson is a little holiday village with only 225 inhabitants and its seashore location is a real charmer! During our stage, playing wales could be seen once a while from the nice promenade along the seafront, as well as from the perfectly restored, shining white jetty. While strolling around, we could often observe more exotic birds than from bird hides; this is real Australia.



Point Samson prove also a perfect base to explore the surroundings, including the port town of Dampier / Karratha. The most impressive outing however, brought us to nearby Cossack. Not unexpectedly, to us, the few historic buildings proved to be "so so". But, the sweeping views from Readers Head Lookout, were just astonishing and well worth the trip.

To one side, a shallow beach exposed big parts of its sandbar with the remaining water forming sinuous ponds glittering in the sunlight. Behind, we saw big iron-ore vessels waiting to get their loads at Cape Lambert's port. Out in the ocean, Jarman Island with its lighthouse was looming and to the east, endless sandy beaches stretched out to the horizon, bordered by mangroves and salt-plains. The 360° views led on to the Harding River mouth and the Pilbara hills in the background. In the distance, the houses of Wickham could be made out and that's where we ventured after a great lunch in the little Café in one of Cossack's restored buildings.



Iron ore: how rocks can stir people and governments

Wickham is another town that developed together with iron ore mining and its shipping respectively. At its entrance, tourists can picture one of the disused huge mining dump trucks. When standing next to this yellow monster, you realize its tyres stand almost twice as tall as a human. At the moment, the mining giant Rio Tinto is working on a project to

automatize the new, even bigger mining dump trucks. They shall be fully remote controlled from Perth some 1,500km south, no need for drivers anymore. Already fully remote controlled are the 2,4km long iron ore trains that commute the 280km between the mine at Tom Price and the port at Cape Lambert, 5km north of Wickham. Cape Lambert is with 170 mega tons (Mt) annually, the world's second largest bulk export port, despite having only about a third of Port Hedland's capacity (the biggest).

Rio Tinto is also the sole user of the iron ore port in Dampier that is only slightly smaller than the one at Cape Lambert. Altogether, 54% of the world's iron ore exports are mined in Australia. As 97% of it comes from Western Australia, the state government's fiscal revenue comes to abt. 50% from the iron ore trade. So, if the Chinese economy steams, the Western Australian economy steams too!



Many mining- and port towns were actually built from scratch by large crude material companies. To keep their employees happy out in the arid nirvana, they do not only pay above average salaries, but provide also infrastructure including all sorts of entertainment facilities; from sports- and playgrounds to cinemas and holiday units. Furthermore, the giant mining companies build shopping centres and try actively to attract supermarkets, as well as small business entrepreneurs. To make sure the gold-rush times with its brothels remain a thing of the past, the employers try to attract families with children. Among other things, they provide child day care centres. BHP Billiton for example, aims at having gender balance among its employees, from labourers to top management jobs, by 2025.



Onslow: sea, salt, gas, cyclones, sunsets and moonrise

Now our journey led us to Onslow, another small seaside village off the beaten track. The rows of modern townhouses lining the esplanade, called 1st Avenue, was surprising for this place of 700 souls. This was not the first village, where we've noticed many new housing developments and nice promenades along seashores. In general, the overall wealth increased in the north of Western Australia and now everything seems clean and proper.

Onslow came into existence 1885, with a loading port for sheep's wool. As the area is often heavily affected by cyclones, the original townsite was shifted some 20km to a more protected bay. Australia's entire north and north-west coasts are prone to cyclones. On big panels at the entrance to any village, the cyclone status is being indicated. Tourist accommodations have leaflets in every room with rules of conduct depending on the cyclone status. If it is high, what can happen during wet season, everyone is required to store emergency food for 5 days and to stay inside, however long is necessary. Then, hotel staff must stay home, and you have to expect roads, power and water to be cut.

Luckily, we had pleasant weather with temperatures around 30°C – still far below the 40-50°C that can strike during 9 months of the year! Furthermore, we were "lucky" to be here on a full-moon night. Together with about 6 other places we've visited during the past month, also Onslow praises itself to be the best place to watch "the world famous" staircase to the moon. They call it a phenomenon and an illusion, when the full moon rises over exposed tidal sandflats, where the remaining water-puddles reflect its light. Whoever believes the tourist brochures, will see it as a staircase to the moon. Let us tell you: we were at that beach during twilight, the day before and the moon rise was magic, with the pastel coloured sky of pink and blue. On the promoted "staircase"-day however, the tourist flock was waiting until it was pitch dark. The red moon, we finally saw rising, appeared just as a glare on every picture. The reflection on the wet sand was, how shall we put it? Well, just normal!

As in so many places in Australia, also Onslow's best restaurant advertises having the best coffee, all over Australia!!! Well, the use of superlatives is omnipresent all over the country, as are good espresso machines nowadays. However, getting a good coffee is another thing, if you want to enjoy it after dinner. As most countryside restaurants are staffed by working holidayers from abroad, they normally say it bluntly if you ask for a cup of coffee: "Sorry, we cleaned the machine already. Australians only drink coffee until 4 PM, after that they ask for alcohol only!"



Meanwhile, also Onslow makes its living from natural resources; currently it's salt and gas. Again, there were large piers for exporting the valuable raw material. Only in 2011, Wheatstone LNG started to flow gas from offshore platforms west of Onslow and process it in its on-shore plant. From the production of solar salt, on the other hand, big drying- (concentration) ponds can be seen in different stages.

Leaving Onslow after 2 days, we passed many impressive termite mounds built by spinifex termites. After 60km, we were back on the highway Nr.1 and soon, the landscape got a bit hillier. Never the less, the road remained dead straight, as in many parts of WA. If there was a bending, it went neither left nor right, but straight uphill or downhill. About every 20km, the landscape was intercepted with long rolling red sand dunes. More and more, we came across patches of flower-gardens set up by mother nature. We were delighted, Western Australia's desert was teeming with wildflowers again!

Exmouth & Cape Range National Park: incredible gorges and beaches

After another 165 lonely kilometres off the North West Coastal Highway, we arrived in Exmouth on August 28, 2018. Twenty kilometres north of town, we rented a cabin on a holiday (caravan) park, on the tip of the North West Cape, just below Vlaming Head lighthouse. It wasn't intended, but we ended up staying 10 days, as we were smitten by the beauty of Cape Range national park and the nearby naturist beach.



Friendly whales greeted us already on the first day, and this just off the shore over the road from where we stayed. Australia's west coast is the annual highway of some 30,000 migrating Humpback whales. Just as regularly, various species of turtles come ashore to lay their eggs in the sand.



The main entrance to Cape Range national park was about 20km south of our accommodation and thanks to our WA-national-park's 1 year-pass, we could regularly go in without additional cost. The park's sheer beauty attracts so many campers, or rather caravaners, they had to book months, and for some pitches and seasons, even a year in advance. Every time we entered, there was a big sign "Camping full - all pitches taken".

Cape Range national park has so much to offer, we visited four times. Though the name of the park suggests it's all about mountains, in fact, the adjacent Ningaloo Reef Marine Park adds to its appeal. The water in front of Cape Range national park's beaches is not as quiet as in a lagoon, but because of the nearby reef, it's of a similar deep turquoise-blue as in any South Pacific lagoon or atoll.

Let's start with the interior: several gorges are deeply washed out into the ranges. Often, red rock walls flanked the currently dry riverbeds. Only Yardie Creek, has water year around. Most gorges are accessible from the western side. However, two sections with spectacular drives to the top of a canyon, are only accessible from the east. We took the newly sealed Charles Knife Road that curved its way past dark limestone up to the namesake canyon. At the top, we enjoyed spectacular views of multicoloured and totally washed out sandstone walls.

We were also lucky to see numerous animals, not only kangaroos, but also emus and even an echidna, an Australian specie resembling the hedgehog, but with longer spikes. To us, the highlight were the



small black footed rock wallabys, we spotted at Mandu Mandu Gorge. With their patterned fur, they are extremely well camouflaged between the rocks.



On the ocean side of Cape Range national park, we were thrilled by the beauty of the uncountable white sandy beaches with turquoise waters. Snorkelling, diving and swimming with whale sharks are also among Exmouth's big tourist magnets. Ningaloo Reef stretches from the tip of North West Cape, 260km southwards along the west coast. This fringing reef is equally beautiful but much easier accessible than the Great Barrier Reef, as Ningaloo Reef is often less than 100m away from the shore. Furthermore, it's much less crowded, as Australia's west coast is far less visited than the over-touristy east coast.

Annually, schools of fish, krill, crab and the like, use Ningaloo for spawning. This attracts Whale Sharks, the world's largest fish, feeding on these huge clouds of spat and eggs, complementing their usual diet of plankton, during times of mass spawning.

On some coastal sections, dead coral and reef sections got petrified and appear as stones and rocks. Where they remain under water, sea cucumbers and urchins can abound. Otherwise, the turquoise beaches are dominated by fine white sand that sometimes stretches into the hinterland as sand dunes.

Mauritius Beach: a turquoise naturist beach

Our favorite strip of sand near Exmouth, was the clothes optional Mauritius Beach, just a couple of kilometers from our lodging. As this beautiful, long naturist beach was barely visited, it offered a lot of space for the few ones, who dared to bare it. As is often the case on Australia's West Coast, there are frequent slabs of



limestone-rocks between the sandy beach and the water. Now and again, we were able to observe whales or turtles directly from the turquoise beach, which was quite exciting!

Less exciting were some visiting royals, the royal Australian flies to be precise. Dozens of them thought it's great fun to use our bare skin as runway! Covering up didn't help: those little buggers then resorted just to the body's other natural orifices, like mouth, ears and nose! Despite counting about 100 of those suckers between the two of us, locals told us that we're very lucky: during the peak of "fly-season" there would be several folds more!

Surely, we hope it's also true that the flies disappear after a couple of months even quicker than they arrived!

Coral Bay: the name says it all

On Sept. 7, 2018 we drove from Exmouth 150km south, to the small tourist-settlement of Coral Bay. Despite being spoilt with what we had seen just before, also Coral Bay charmed us more than we had hoped for. Already the walks along the turquoise beach were a highlight. The powder white sand strip is guarded over by sand dunes in different colours, and sections with reddish limestone rock cliffs. Between the rocks, we found mysterious spoor in the sand. One time, we were lucky to see a perpetrator: a beautifully patterned large Monitor Lizard (or Goanna). Bird life however, abound: Seagulls, Sandpipers, Cormorants, Terns and more. Once we could observe a Pelican fishing in shallow water. Within less than 10 minutes, it caught a sumptuous dinner of a good dozen fish by turning its neck blazingly fast and snatching with its beak skilfully after its prey. The fish disappeared in the throat pouch, still flipping before being swallowed.





Coral Bay has plenty of tour operators, offering whale-, whale-shark- and Dolphin-watching, diving, as well as snorkelling and coral viewing from glass-bottom boats. Brigitte's highlight was snorkelling, which is easy from the beach, as Ningaloo Reef is very close to the shore here. It's also very safe, as the current drifts one into the bay again. The healthy coral was mainly of purple and brown colour. There wasn't a big variety, but very impressive hard corals; giant rosettes of up to 5m across, others that looked like big quiver and also lots of stag-horn corals.

While driving southwards from Coral Bay, we soon crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, meaning downpours should become more evenly distributed all year around. No more Noah's floods alternating with months without raindrops. Yet, there were still four metres tall floodway indicators along the main road. The weather remained sunny and dry, but due to rainfall during the past weeks, there were now ever more spring flowers popping up.



Canarvon: not only flower, but also vegetable- and fruit-power

While approaching Carnarvon, our next destination, big panels along the highway indicated, we were reaching an area with many orchards. To stop disease from spreading, quarantine restrictions are in force, meaning we were kindly requested to "eat it, or bin it", if we'd carry some green stuff. We didn't have anything green, but lots of orange, so we stuffed ourselves with mandarins.



Thanks to Australia's diverse climate, the vast majority of fruit and vegetables sold in supermarkets is homegrown. Here in Carnarvon, farmers bring the biggest part of their bacon home by nursing Bananas, Melon, tree- & other fruits, but also Tomatoes and other vegetables. Despite being a vast, mainly dry and arid country, Australia has regions where the climate is also perfect to grow potatoes, salads, avocados, and lots of other vegetables, as well as apples, grapes, all sorts of berries, kiwis, pineapples, mangoes, corn, wheat and even rice and coffee.

The village of Carnarvon occupies a lovely spot on the Gascogne Rivermouth. The two offshore islands Babbage and Whitlock, form natural harbour shelters. Both are pleasant to walk on and are even interconnected by a dam and an abandoned railway. In old times, Carnarvon's harbour was used to ship wool and cattle, brought in by this railway. Nowadays, a museum near the former jetty commemorates the history of that epoch.

Shark Bay: where everybody but us flocks to see dolphins



On Sept. 11, 2018 we drove along more wildflower lined roads to Denham. The village is situated some 130km away from the main road, at the tip of a long finger-shaped peninsula, facing Shark Bay. Though we arrived without reservation, the internet helped us to find a good and cheap place to stay. For 80 AU\$ (€ 55) we got a holiday apartment with two bedrooms, and this just 50m from the beach. It wasn't brand new, but 40\$ cheaper than we had paid at the Backpacker's place in Coral Bay, just for an en-suite room. Now we had the perfect base to explore the diverse sights of Shark Bay.

We left the tourist-draws Monkey Mia with its dolphins and the living fossil-rocks Stromatolites to the crowds, as we had seen it all before. Instead, we visited Little Lagoon, Eagle Bluff, Whalebone Bay and Shell Beach, a beach of tiny shells only, instead of sand. A few meters below the surface, the Fragum Cockle is so compressed, blocks of shells had been sawn out in a "quarry" and used as construction material for houses, like our accommodation.

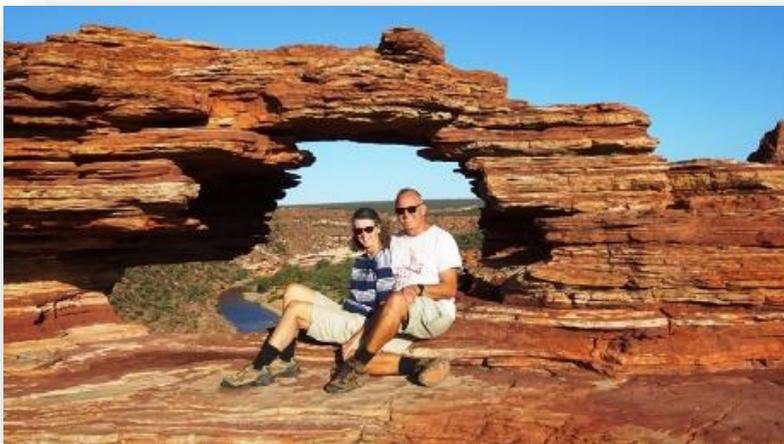


All beaches were again of turquoise water, including the one in front of Denham's Esplanade. Cormorants were drying their wings on the pier and in the crystal-clear water, dark patches of sea-grass were visible. This is the food of the sea cow, Dugong. Amateurishly described, this mammal looks like a crossbreed between a seal and a dolphin.

After 5 days in Denham, we attempted the 380km through the void to Kalbarri. Also here, it wasn't a boring drive at all, rather a culmination of highlights. The animal kingdom was eagerly waiting to greet us on the roadside. Most noteworthy were a Thorny Devil, Eagles, black Cockatoos and Emus. We saw also domestic sheep grazing in a sea of purple flowers and some feral goats in one of yellow everlastings. Driving through a carpet of wildflowers had meanwhile become quite common, but passing trucks with houses, was not. The landscape had visibly become greener and trees or bushes taller. Very suddenly, 20km before the turn-off to Kalbarri, the bushland gave way to open meadows and green pastoral fields of crop.



Kalbarri: a "surf and turf" national park ablaze with flowers



Our next destination was Kalbarri, a village we visited because of its namesake national park. Consisting of two sections, the "turf" part lies inland, nestled around the deep Murchison River Gorge. The "surf" part on the other hand, snuggles around the coast south of Kalbarri village. Each section is so different and diverse, it would qualify to be a park on its own. Now in spring, both boosted an unbelievable array of wildflowers and of course, also a wide array of wildlife that enjoys the flowers, and later the seeds, as complimentary diet. Wherever we stopped along the road, there were again different species of flowers. The biggest flowers were often blooming on trees, and the tiniest

sometimes just out of the sand. We took hundreds of macro pictures and were often surprised by the multitude of shapes. Especially impressive, we found the so-called kangaroo- and also the smaller cat-paws, the short leaved starflower, the pink and yellow verticordia with their feathery petals, and the fleecy balls of the lambswool with their little blue eyes.

Animal wise, the most outstanding creature (Moloch horridus), a spiky ~9cm lizard. and green, this warty mini-saurian is road or on the reddish soil. It's very hard to Devil freezes if a suspected predator or



we met, was the little Thorny Devil Due to its unique pattern of grey, brown extremely well camouflaged, be it on the spot, but very easy to picture, as the Thorny simply a tourist comes close.

Our exploration started with the viewpoints

high above Murchison River. There are two

access roads into the interior sections of the national park, though each viewpoint is at least 35, currently flowery, kilometres away from Kalbarri town. Not only the views down to the gorge were breath-taking wherever we went, it was also worthwhile to put on walking boots and take advantage of the nicely laid out hiking trails. There is lots of good infrastructure in Western Australian national parks in general. There are not only excellent access roads and hiking paths, but also toilets, shaded picnic areas and parking for vehicles of every type and size. There is certainly much more being invested than collected with admission fees. One lookout was currently closed, as its being re-developed to become the park's most spectacular viewpoint: "Kalbarri Skywalk". The AUD 20 mio. project (€ 12.5 mio.) will give visitors the unique opportunity to walk, at a dizzy height, 25m over the cliff edge. This protruding terrace will probably attract as many admirers of architectural marvels, as thrill seekers and nature lovers.

Less thrilling though equally breath-taking, is Kalbarri national park's coastal section. The reddish layered rock cliffs high above the Indian Ocean, were already among Brigitte's top favourites during our past visits. Most outstanding, even more so before sunset, were the vistas at Eagle Gorge, Island Rock and above the Natural Bridge. Again, many parts are accessible on boardwalks and for those with more time, it's still worthwhile to wear hiking boots and explore the less developed sections.

Kalbarri national park's 10 coastal lookouts start only a few kilometres from the namesake town. All offer sweeping views, and even the views along Kalbarri's promenade are extraordinary. Luckily, we had four days, so we could enjoy the seaside resort's turquoise bay, framed by sandbars, as well as crushing waves.

Considering the almost calm lagoon, the power of the rollers was even more remarkable.



Back to civilisation: to places with a heart and a soul

Only 50km south of Kalbarri, we arrived at Hutt Lagoon near Port Gregory. In tourist brochures, this salt lake is referred to as Pink Lake. The algae *dunaliella salina* is responsible for the colour. It's a food supply for brine shrimp, which in turn feeds water birds like black winged stilts. The pink algae is commercially harvested as it produces beta carotene, a food- and make-up colouring agent.



Soon we reached Northampton, the first historically grown village with a visible village centre, we had seen in a long time! After all these modern, but functional and often soulless settlements that had either sprung up because of mining-, orchard-, or the tourist-trade, Northampton was finally again a village with a heart and a soul. Besides the historic buildings in the village centre, some 50 artist-created sculptures of sheep were also eye striking.

Once we reached Geraldton, some 50km further south, we were definitely back in civilisation. With 40,000 inhabitants, this was finally again a real town. The large industrial port didn't harm the charm of the waterfront. The shopping centres are again placed in the outskirts, whereas local shops, boutiques and restaurants dominate the centre. Here, we lodged at the nice Geraldton Backpacker's, bang in the centre.

The internet age has a huge impact for long-term travellers and backpackers in general. During our last trip 12 years ago, backpacker's places abounded all over Australia and normally, we got a good and cheap double room just by popping up. Then, weekends were no-problem, as many hostels were reluctant to take Aussies, because they subsisted on alcohol.

However, the times of "international hostels" are gone. In areas with few accommodations, bargain rooms and even dorm beds, get booked away by internet weeks, if not months ahead. In areas with lots of competition however, internet tools make it easy to compare prices, and this resulted in more competitive pricing. As a result, especially in rural areas, Backpacker's hostels have disappeared. In urbanised areas on the other hand, the internet did often indicate, where to find good deals. Thanks to this, we got often spontaneously and without booking, a posh motel room or even an entire holiday apartment, for less than a small double room in a youth hostel would have cost.



Desert & Dunes: mysterious worlds in and of sand



As a long weekend forced us to pre-book, we had unfortunately only two nights in Geraldton. Along the way, we had a quick look at the coastal villages Dongara and Port Denison, before heading inland to Western Flora Caravan Park near Eneabba. This holiday park attracts the crowd with informative wildflower-tours including impressive displays under an electronic microscope. Pleasant are also the 12km hiking tracks, as the camp ground is situated inside a nature reserve.

Back on the coast, we followed the Indian Ocean Drive and stopped at several scenic lookouts and beaches. If it wasn't Queen's Birthday (the second time in 4 months), it would have been quite lonely at most spots. On this weekend however, many beaches were crammed with caravanning city folks from Perth, taking advantage of the warm spring weather.

We reached Cervantes, on September 23, 2018, and moved into an unreasonably spacious holiday home. Unfortunately, it was only available for that one night, but never the less, cheaper than a room at the nearby motel.



Now we were near Nambung national park, better known as the Pinnacle Desert. We visited this mystical site twice – first at sunset and again on the next day. Ten-thousands of rock pillars with totally individual shapes, poke out of the golden sandy desert. A narrow, 4km track of compressed sand allows small vehicles to drive through this landscape of limestone pillars. More rewarding was to park the car in a bay, and to wander between the pinnacles afoot. Their forms and sizes are very diverse. The smallest ones come barely out of the sand, whereas the tallest ones stand up to 4 meters high. Also the diameters range from just a few centimetres to a few meters. Some pinnacles have rounded tops and look quite solid, others look quite fragile and started crumbling. Even their colours are different; most are yellowish, some appear white, others blackish and some are layered with different colours. Among scientists, it's still disputed how the Pinnacles emerged and it all really looks very mysterious!

We were told, the Pinnacle Desert reaches as far as Lancelin and is partly (still) buried by huge shifting sand dunes. The Aussie Blokes always love to drive their 4x4's across the sand dunes and the large boards with contact numbers of towing companies, do not hinder them at all. At the big white sand dunes in Lancelin, this fun is commercialised. Most visitors probably drive around the sand a bit more carefully, if they use their own car. In a rented vehicle, the story is totally different. Not and a kind of racing-cars designed for sand, could be hired for thrill rides. As the steep dunes are declared "crown land", there is unfortunately no restriction, where the pilots of these racing cars could speed like a bat out of hell. Therefore, we didn't feel comfortable anymore, clambering around the same dunes.

Lancelin emerged as holiday village for the city folks of Perth, only 120km to the south. Posh vacation villas abound, and a fair share of Café's and restaurants is keen to please the holiday makers, after and between the beach. The water is again of an astonishing turquoise colour that you hardly want to take your eyes off. The



scenery is further enhanced by little islets, one of which regularly attracts sea lions. The wind blows often hard, which draws kite-surfers to this fascinating coast line. For the longest time, we observed one dare-devil skilfully jumping high out of the waves on his board.

Our last destination before reaching Perth, was Yanchep national park. It's attractively landscaped to please the families from the city. Whereas the national parks in the north had visitor's centres that barely sold more than souvenirs and maybe an ice cream, Yanchep offers plenty of opportunities to get small snacks or full meals. Furthermore, smart landscaping makes sure that Koalas (and other animals) stay near the board-walk and foot path. To us, Yanchep appeared more like an animal- and nature park than a national park.

Perth: a charming city and home to the vast majority of WA's population



On September 27th, 2018 we've reached Western Australia's capital Perth. To us, coming from north-western Australia, it felt like a huge city. However, when we had arrived from Japan and China some 12 years ago, Perth had rather felt like a widely scattered country town with uncountable bungalows and a few skyscrapers in the very centre. Though, a few more skyscrapers were erected in the meantime, even the centre is still dominated by 2 storey buildings. Most of the town's just over two million inhabitants, still live in detached houses, scattered around the 6,417.9 km² large town. Perth' location on the shores of Swan River and the pleasant Kings-Park overlooking the city, are big assets.



With its low key, but nevertheless cosmopolitan character, Perth is among our favourite cities; somehow, we feel like at home here. In no other Australian town, we've spent more time than in Perth. With some Good Luck, Brigitte sniffed out an internet-deal for an apartment with car park, that set us back less than a room at the downtown youth-hostel would have. Our dwelling was perfectly situated between the upmarket Suburb of Leederville, where we found some real bread, and Northbridge, with its uncountable healthy, cheap and excellent Asian Restaurants. We love this multicultural vibe with authentic food from China, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, India and more....

Also in the suburb of Northbridge, the Asians are a big gain for the quarter, whereas those Australians, who had immigrated from Europe long ago, are often the troublemakers, especially on weekends. As we had seen in other prudish Victorian societies, dressing up like tarts for hunting and getting drunk seems to be socially acceptable. As in most Australian cities, also some areas of Perth, like Northbridge, are heavily patrolled by police during weekends, to keep the unpleasant side-effects of extensive drinking under control. Eating out early, was our recipe around it. If possible, we try to avoid Australian towns during weekends at all. Nevertheless, as we finally spent 2 ½ weeks, we obviously had a very good time in Perth.

Unsurprisingly, the city's few skyscrapers are predominantly owned by major financial institutions and of course the country's big mining companies. After exploring the Pilbara in the north of WA, it was even more awe-inspiring to know that almost all engine drivers for the 3 km long iron-ore trains commuting some 2,000 km north of here, and even some of the lorry drivers for the big mining dump-trucks, do their jobs right here: in Perth Downtown! No heat, no dust, rather tie and high heels. Sitting on computers, the valuable vehicles (and much more) are remote-controlled from BHP Billiton's and Rio Tinto's and other mining companies' office towers!



<p>2 BEDROOM from \$1,117,000</p>	<p>3 BEDROOM from \$1,561,000</p>

Again, we discovered the pleasant town afoot. Ten to fifteen-kilometre-long city strolls were no exception. Very enjoyable is the area on the shores of Swan river, that widens to be almost a lake besides the city. Real-estate managers became long aware that this is a sought-after area for the growing upper-class. They work hard and lack the time to commute daily to a nice villa on the outskirts.

Three-bedroom apartments in a new apartment tower near swan river, are available from 1.56 million Australian dollars (~1 million Euros). Self-efferently, for the lower floors. Prices for river-view apartments the sky. Though, most locals "have to contend" with a kilometres from the centre, those exclusive city-centre reach for commoners.

this bargain price is only valid rise with each storey further to one-family-home a few apartments are certainly out of



Obviously, Australians became wealthier and therefore, also the prices rose substantially. We still remember how puzzled we were towards the end of our trip 25 years ago, when we studied real estate prices outside of Perth: then we could still have afforded to buy a house and even pay it cash, as less than Euro 20,000 could have bought you a decent house! Today, we would need a loan, and soon after moving in, we would either need to file in bankruptcy or even worse, to work! At least here in Western Australia, the rat-race is much more relaxed than in the rest of the country. City folks from the east coast still speak of "flying back to Australia", when they return from WA at the end of their holiday.



Sunseekers: naturist club in the Perth hills



October 14th, 2018 had been a bit wet, but the weather forecast predicted brilliant sunshine for the next three days, with temperatures rising up to 28° degrees Celsius. Naturally, we deemed this as perfect, to spend a few southern spring days at Sunseekers, an inviting naturist club in the Perth Hills. It's the only naturist club outside of Switzerland, we've ever

become members. Ahead of our five weeks stage in 2006, Sunseekers proposed us a one-year membership, as this was the most economical option for such a long stage. Back then, we needed a naturist break during a longer trip around Asia, this time however, our (initial) intention was to stay only a few days, before continuing our trip around the red continent.

Just outside the gate, we were already “welcomed” by a big number of kangaroos. A female with a joey, how a baby kangaroo is called, stood just next to the entrance gate, and a couple of dozen roos were grazing on a meadow across the road. Meanwhile, we were used to meet more (exotic) animals than naturists, even at popular clubs like Sunseekers. In Australia, the clothes free lifestyle is by far not as popular, as in Europe!



Sunseekers is a quiet, forested bush-oasis in the Perth Hills, some 30 kilometres from the city centre. The suburb of Manduring is only 7 road kilometres away and there we found all major supermarkets.

Many of Sunseekers ~150 members own a small simple hut or a caravan where they spend their weekends. The club's facilities include a large swimming pool, several sports- and play grounds, and an impressively large brick club-house, where up to 4 (four) functions are held each month. Upon arrival, we could choose between two lodgings: the small cabin in which we had stayed last

time (still equipped with the little baking oven we had left then), and a much larger, but rather rustically equipped cottage, the club just “inherited” from a deceased member. Even though it wasn't connected to tap-water, there was a kitchen with two hotplates and a small baking oven. There was also a sink, of which we were several times assured that it is connected to the sewer: “It's by far the easiest to get some hot-water from the nearby washhouse and use the sink in the cottage for the washing up.” Well, when we drained the sink, the water splashed first onto the kitchen furniture and from there into our shoes... The little surprises at member operated clubs are just part of the experience that add some further spice to the alternative lifestyle!

Sunseekers is a very well organized club. Two member-couples live permanently on the ground and serve alternate as caretakers. We're still in contact with Jytty & John, the caretakers during our visit 12 years ago. Now, they invited us to their home in a suburb, and we also met up at the club again.

As temperatures were rather low during our first days, there weren't many people at Sunseekers in the middle of October. Though, as the quicksilver rose to almost 30 degrees, even midweek, more than a dozen members popped up. Not unexpectedly, sundowner was held, but we found it more rewarding to do the short ~750 metres walk around the ground, having a chat with other happy-hour philistines and watching out for wildlife. We've missed the goanna that was present during our stage, but several times we've met a little “bandit”, an animal we had never seen before: a Bandicoot, a cute, little marsupial. At first, we thought it's a little shy, but at least since it started to stand up not only next to our mineral-water bottle, but also next to Brigitte's chair, we knew this little creature is rather cheeky than shy!



Kangaroos: unique animals with unusual reproduction systems

We got already quite used to seeing kangaroos at naturist grounds and also Sunseekers had a fair share. Especially cute was a female with a young joey. Obviously, the baby kangaroo only just started leaving its mother's pouch and made its first clumsy attempts to bounce around. Though, it always hopped back into the mother's pouch after a few minutes, it was very sweet to watch the little bugger jump, stand wobbly upright, bend backwards like a banana, or scratch itself.



Likewise all marsupials, also kangaroos have an uncommon reproduction system. Kangaroo females have two uteruses, plus three vaginas; two sideways for insemination and transporting sperm, and a tiny central one for giving birth. By putting the growth of the foetuses in her uteruses on hold, the female can even delay her pregnancy until a period of extreme drought is over and there is again enough food, or until the last kangaroo child leaves the pouch and frees it for the next joey!

That way, a female kangaroo can be in a continuous state of pregnancy, with a fertilised egg in one uterus waiting to be released, a foetus growing in the second uterus, one baby in her pouch and another hopping along outside, but still coming to its mother for milk. The mother kangaroo will produce two different

kinds of milk, one for a joey that stays inside the pouch, and another for a joey that has left the pouch, but still feeds on her breast.

After a gestation period of only about one month in the uterus, the kangaroo female leaks a trail from her vagina to her pouch. Soon thereafter, she gives birth. The tiny, hairless baby, the size of a jelly-bean, less than 2 cm long and less than 1 gram heavy, begins now an epic journey to the pouch, where it attaches itself to a nipple. Inside the pouch, the joey grows quite quick, but depending on the specie, it takes between 4 and 9 months, until the young kangaroo sticks its head out of the pouch for the first time. Soon thereafter, it's ready for the first short discovery trips outside the pouch. However, it takes up to 1 ½ years, until the joey leaves the pouch forever.

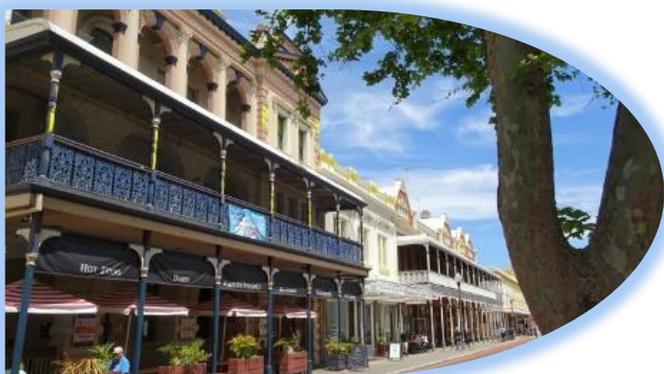
Many marsupial males have a bifurcated penis that splits in two just at the right point; exactly where the female's body opening splits into the two vaginas that are to be inseminated. The kangaroo penis on the other hand, is not that sophisticated, so the poor buggler has to contend with inseminating only one vagina at once. To give also the genitals of kangaroo males uniqueness, their testicles hang above, not below the penis. Kangaroos live in mobs consisting of a few, up to one hundred animals, with a dominant male. He does not miss out anything, as he will not tolerate another male mating. However, from time to time he will be challenged by other males in the troop, keen to take over his harem.



Well, with so much animal entertainment, our intended 4-5 days at Sunseekers, became a fortnight stage. In between two periods with brilliant and hot weather, we had also a week of overcast sky and a few downpours. However, in Australia's south-west, precipitations remain normally rather short, no comparisons to European cloudbursts! Moreover, after we had had 7 months of almost permanent sunny and warm weather, the little rumbling of the Weather-Gods gave us time to catch up with our travel-diary and to bring some order into our uncountable good-weather pictures. After some final sunny days and temperatures of up to 30°C, we left Sunseekers once more with very good memories.

Freemantle: beloved port town

As the distance to our next destination was rather short and the weather tempting to stay, we left Sunseekers rather late. There were several viewpoints in Perth's hinterland we still counted on visiting. However, we hadn't reckoned with the fact that not only most town parks, but also some lookouts close at 5 PM to prevent drunks from partying there. Luckily, we don't mind walking, so where possible, we parked in front of the barrier and walked to the Belvedere.



In the evening of October 28, 2018, we arrived at Fremantle's former prison, where the wardens nowadays accept credit cards in exchange for keys. The entire complex has been transformed into a very modern youth-hostel, yet preserving and skilfully integrating elements of the old goal. We stayed in a contemporary extension, newly built within the thick enclosing walls. Many of the original small cells remain in use, either as budget-twins with bunkbeds, or as toilet/shower cubicles. The corridors contain a gallery of stories, anecdotes and fotos of (in)famous inmates.

Though officially a suburb of Perth, Fremantle is actually a town on its own and it feels quite different to WA's capital. Fremantle has many streets lined with well-preserved colonial-era buildings and an important shipping port. "Freo" is a popular day outing for the city folks, who love to come to the so-called Cappuccino-strip and harbour-front. Restaurants abound along the Fishing Boat harbour and though their names promise variety, most of them, even if called "sweet lips", turned out to be nothing more than fish & chips restaurants. If we thought fish & chips is an economic "family meal", we were proved wrong. People queued to pay an arm and a leg to munch their beloved fish & chips down at this prime location. We however, preferred the similarly priced, decent Italian-style meals in the centre, only a few hundred metres away. It seems that among Perthites, (also referred to as...Pertherts, Perthetics etc.) the number of foodies is much lower than in Australia's eastern cities. What's common all over the country on the other hand, are presumptuous marketing

preferences. Sometimes, you're at loss, as everyone seems to be, or to have "the" best rated, the best in the world/in town/in the street, the favourite, the number one, the most popular, the most beloved....if not: **SIMPLY THE BEST**".

Driving south, we passed a still rather densely populated and industrialized area, yet the scenery became slowly more beautiful. The interior was dominated by green farmland, rivers and lakes, the coast on the other hand, by long sandy beaches and rocky cliffs. Rockingham and Mandurah are both pleasant seaside resort towns attracting retirees and holiday makers. Holiday-homes, -apartment buildings and harbourside restaurants abound. Outside Mandurah, we found once more a small holiday apartment that tempted us to stay longer than planned. From there, we visited not only the Mediterranean inspired suburb of Port Bouvard, but also the Peel-Harvey Estuary and the thrombolites at Lake Clifton.

Some (bizarre) facts: from whales to naked honey and tourists in cages



Next, we enjoyed the pleasant town of Bunbury for a couple of days, before continuing to Busselton. Funnily, on a holiday park, we were given a cottage called Swiss chalet. It was an ideal base to visit Cape Naturaliste national park and its coast, where migrating whales could still be spotted. On several occasions, we were lucky to see graceful Humpback- and even bigger Blue whales. It was extremely impressive to see these giants of the ocean slowly approaching. What we noticed first, were often the whales' blows, in fact, the warm, humid (and smelly) breath of those krill-eating sea mammals. If we were lucky, the whales re-surfaced a few times near the shore on their migration southwards. Thanks to their size, they only move slowly, so they are much easier to observe than dolphins. However, the latter live quite numerous in these waters year around. Often, we could see some cute dolphins playing in the waves along a beach.

Apart from rare attacks by mobs of Orcas, adult whales normally don't have predators. Though, the law of nature still has them dying to become a source of new life. Twice, we came across signs warning that a whale carcass is present. This meant, the beaches in the far vicinity were closed for bathing to protect people from bacteria. Also sharks, are attracted by a carcass and if they see a chance to snack on fresh meat, instead of rotten meat, they might take it...

On the other hand, humans are thrill seekers by nature and Australia's tourist industry is here to help. Across the country, tours are offered to swim with dolphins, whales, whale-sharks, seals, tuna - whatever tourists are willing to pay for. If that's not enough, you might like to brag with swimming with sharp toothed large crocodiles or sharks. You don't necessarily need to mention the cage in which you were sunk into the water – it was mainly there to protect your camera!

We however, were more than satisfied with the many animals we could observe on land and from the shore. Thanks to our 30x zoom compact camera, we captured often a lot of details that are barely visible to the naked eye.



Apropos naked; naked and nude are among the top favourite catch phrases of the otherwise extremely prudish Australians. In the supermarket you find "naked yoghurt, nude juices" and you buy your meat at the popular "Nude Butcher", though the only nude thing you find, are the meats on the counter. A beekeeper advertised his products with "nude honey – get naked" and "naked honey – get raw". Surreal, we found also the make-up brand "Nude by Nature" - newly painted hasn't anything in common with natural nudity, indeed!



Next to a petrol station in a little hamlet, there was a sign "nudist crossing". When we questioned the grumpy pump attendant, whether there is a nudist club nearby, he just muttered something about a few drunks... In the outback, road houses post their house-rules often under a big letter-title like: naked, nude, sex for free etc. continuing: "now that we have your attention blablabla" – and this in a country where teachers, male and female alike, get sacked for visiting a naturist club!

Margaret River Region: turquoise beaches and world-class dining



From Busselton, we continued to Yallingup, from where we started exploring the Margaret River region's coastal belt. Turquoise beaches line the coastline all the way south and once a while there are small villages with low key clusters of holiday homes. One of them was Prevelly, where we stayed in a surf lodge. From there, we ventured 10km inland to the town of Margaret River, situated amidst vineyards. The region managed to build up a reputation not only for its "grape juices" but also for its gastronomic delights. Wine & dine weekend-outings, in combination with luxury accommodation, have become very popular.

We indulged into a culinary experience at Miki's Open Kitchen, a Japanese inspired fusion-cuisine. Seated around the kitchen, we could watch the team of chefs prepare our six courses, each consisting of 3 to 6 creative tiny delights.

Back on the sight-seeing path, we were rewarded with delights of nature; crushing waves met colourful, multi-layered rocks along the shore, and there were a surprising number of flowering bushes. The best treat awaited at Cape Leeuwin national park south of Augusta. The grace of nature was enhanced by a lighthouse and a mill, built by early settlers, though the mineral rich water has brought the latter to a stop by calcification...

The hinterland is quite forested, hiding caves and rivers. Once a while, there were some grass trees, among them, the biggest one we had seen all over Australia. It had a triple-crown and we guess, it stood more than 5 metres tall.



Tall Timber Country: big trees and controlled burning

On November 13, 2018, we continued to Western Australia's Tall Timber country. Logging was, and to a certain extent still is, big business in this area. The forests are still vast, and big patches have been declared national parks and made accessible to tourists. Already the scenic drives through the woods are quite rewarding, but there are also some very special trees that can be visited afoot via shorter or longer (board-) walks. We ventured to the so-called "walk through tree" in Bedeloop national park, where a mood of nature created a natural tunnel through the lower part of the stem of a healthy-looking Karri tree.



Forest fires are a threat especially during the hot summer months. In old times, the forests were monitored from manned watch-towers, mounted to the tops of the tallest trees. In Pemberton, tourists who dare, are invited to tackle the climbing pegs to the lookout at the top of Gloucester-Tree on 53m above the forest floor. Heinz was brave enough during our last visit 12 years ago but this time we were too busy watching birds.

The village of Pemberton is surprisingly charming with its many old timber cottages. There is an entire Timber Mill Workers' Cottage Precinct. The sawmill only closed in 2016, after more than a century of operation. During the heydays of the mill, the Pemberton-Northcliffe railway served the needs of the settlers and the mill at the same time. But since 1987, the train operates as Pemberton Tramway for the sole purpose of tourism.

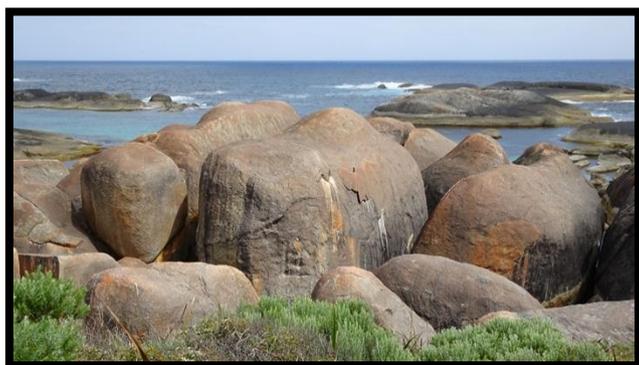
The road southwards leads through dense karri- and jarrah forest down to the coast. Between Northcliffe and Windy Harbour, we visited the impressive Mount Chudalup. This isn't a mountain in the narrow sense of word, but a Monadnock, which is a huge block of granite above a flat plain. Windy Harbour is a worthwhile detour that rewarded us with a good number of great viewpoints overlooking the craggy limestone coastline and some rocky islands.

Later that day, when we continued towards Walepole, we approached an area with heavy smoke. Soon, we came across signs indicating "prescribed burning". Obviously, the fire brigade had lit some big patches of wood along one side of the road, controlled but never the less impressive. Aboriginal people know already for a long time that controlled burnings may prevent uncontrolled forest fires. During the dry and hot summers, the forest often catches fire by itself so it's better to alight the woods in a more favourable time after which green sprouts quickly again. That way, the wounds caused by fire are quickly healed by new life that will be denser and more resistant than before. Obviously, the nature's circle of life and death is benefitting flora, fauna, and humans alike.



Great Southern: a sparsely populated craggy costal region

On November 15th, 2018, our WA-journey continued to the Great Southern region, with its capital Albany. After the Perth-Peel Metropolitan area, the Great Southern is WA's third most densely populated region. Its size of 39,000 km² equals ~Switzerland's, but its population of 54,000 is only about 0.6% (zero point six!) of Switzerland's. Seemingly unlimited space and empty roads are still a fact in these whereabouts.



William Bay National Park with Greens Pool and pretty Elephant Cove was our first stop. A mood of nature had shaped an placed some large granite boulders tightly together that they resemble a small herd of elephants standing in a turquoise green cove. Those peculiar boulders came to fame under the name elephant rocks.

Only a bit further east, we reached the village of Denmark (sometimes not only place- but entire country names were copied Down Under). Also here, you find a number of superb viewpoints, especially those high above Wilson Inlet at the mouth of Harding River.

Afterwards, we based ourselves for a week in the historic town of Albany. Apart from some colonial style buildings from the end of the 19th century, the town's landmarks are a modern Entertainment Centre on the waterfront, and the grain loading facilities at the port. To us, the surrounding spectacular coastline was the main attraction. We ventured to Torndirrup National Park with its most prominent features; natural (rock) bridge and a rock crevice, simply called The Gap. From rocky outcrops to sandy beaches and blow holes, the park spoils visitors with spectacular views over its craggy coastline.

Another coastal highlight awaits at West Cape Howe national park. An excellent gravel road leads up to a viewpoint high above the sea, offering breath-taking views of Shelly Beach to one side, and broken off rocks to the other.

More coastal delights awaited, as we continued eastwards on November 21, 2018. The name "Two People's Bay" promises already some kind of paradise and the namesake national park really lives up to this expectation. Incredibly green bays tempt you to spend hours here – at least we had our lunch on a rock high above the water. Our beach-hopping continued with a stop at Betty's Beach, before overnighing at Cheynes Beach Caravan and Holiday Park. After staying at several holiday-apartments and motels, here we got a mobile-home. Between June and October, Cheynes Beach is a prime spot for whale watching, but now it was too late to see them. Nevertheless, the beaches are still stunning, rare birds abound, as did common kangaroos after dawn.



Wheatbelt: a pleasant change of scenery

Aiming to see Wave Rock near Hyden, we drove inland. The scenery changed as quick, as the temperature rose. In Australia, it's not uncommon that to have 10° to 20° C more only a short distance away from the coast. Soon we were among wheat fields that were just about getting harvested. The few small villages serve mainly the needs of grain farmers. Most settlements are dominated by giant wheat silos, some expertly painted with art work.



Our next overnight stop was at Borden, just north of the Stirling Ranges. We were not yet in the political Wheatbelt-Region as such, but also in Borden, the crop provides the daily bread and butter. Huge harvesters became common sight, as did road trains transporting the grain to the receival points. As it's too expensive to store all crops in silos, so-called "grain bunkers" or "open topped wheat bins" respectively, are also common. These are elongated, conveyor-belt fed pyramids of bulk crop, held together with low bunker walls and covered by plastic foils. During the harvesting season 2017-18, almost 40 million tonnes of crop was produced all over Australia, of which the biggest part was exported to China – likewise iron ore.

Not only the golden corn fields, but also the uncountable small and big salt lakes along our way up north, were eye striking. We were astonished by the picturesque salt lake next to the overnight.

some impressive rock formations, resembling a roller in the ocean. long curved granite wall on the side quite a few all over WA. Another of The Hump, some 30km north of and more interesting than its famous brother, so we spent quite a few hours mounting it along the Kalari-Trail.



sheer size of Lake Grace, a namesake village, where we stayed

Once we reached Hyden, we visited The most famous was Wave Rock, Basically, it's nothing more than a of a big inselberg of which there are those inselbergs (or monadnocks) is Hyden. We found it to be more varied

Also very rewarding, were Buckley's Breakaways, colourful sandstone washouts, we've reached on a gravel road south of Hyden. It's a shame we were the only tourists to visit this very impressive sight, considering the number of visitors at Wave Rock. Driving past Lake King southwards, back to the coast, we were awaited by more wheat fields, more impressive harvest machinery and more fascinating salt lakes.

Hopetoun and Fitzgerald River national park: just awesome

On November 27, 2018 we based ourselves at the motel in Hopetoun. It's only a small village with a few holiday-homes and -parks, and a great national park in its neighbourhood: Fitzgerald River.



We have seen so many spectacular national parks indeed, but Fitzgerald River really is among those of the top of our favourite's-list! We say this despite visiting only the small eastern part this time (whereas we had explored more on a previous visit). After passing a narrow strip of land between Culham Inlet and the open sea, the road soon ascends to a lookout, providing spectacular views of the waters that are just separated by a sand dune.

Down at the water's edge, we clambered among very peculiar rock formations. In one bay, there were inclined, layered rocks that appeared to be like tiles stuck to each other, but with quite pointy ends. On another beach, similarly inclined stacks of rocks

stood scattered around, but here with roundish ends. Furthermore, there are weathered sandstones with holes and weird shapes, as well as layered rock of a multitude of colours and components, some of which are crystal-like and shine in black and silver colours.

Many bushes were still in bloom at Fitzgerald River national park, colouring the hills. One very special plant grows here; Royal Hakea, a shrub that stands up to 3m tall and looks like a grown-out cabbage. Its leaves resemble cabbage leaves and have inner veins of vivid orange, then further up yellow, with a brighter green frame in the leaves upper part.



Furthermore, we were smitten by a number of beaches with off-shore rock-islets, surrounded by crystal clear, greenish water. In some bays, the water was calm like on a mirror, other beaches were hit by crushing waves. As most Australian national parks, also Fitzroy River gave us the feeling of being in an animal park. In some areas, kangaroos and wallabys abounded, but we were also lucky to see some goannas and a snake was lucky that we just could stop our car in time.

Esperance: sightseeing and sunbathing before leaving WA

From November 29, till December 10, 2018, we had a little holiday within our holiday in Esperance, for which we found an ideal apartment. Esperance is, with 10,000 inhabitants, by far and wide the only sizeable place. Though the main sources of revenue are farming, mining and fishing, the town became a popular holiday destination thanks to its astonishing beaches.

You might not believe it, but we must rave about yet another national park: Cape Le Grand, about 50km east of



Esperance. Some tourists might visit, because kangaroo sightings are almost warranted. At the campground next to Lucky Bay, it seems as if at least one kangaroo would be assigned to every pitch. Often, you see them also on the car park and even on the beach. As we don't have any shortage of kangaroo sightings, we were more astonished by the bright blue colour of the water at Lucky Bay. Approaching the bay by descending the access road is an impressive experience that lasts forever and which no picture can do justice - and if one did, in the aftermath you wouldn't believe those colours were real – not photo shopped!

The Esperance region has uncountable superb lookouts where it's worthwhile to leave the car and go for a stroll along the beach or on the footpath high above it. Also the Esplanade, in front of the town centre is a joy to walk on, with the yacht harbour and working port in view. Countless shaded playgrounds, picnic-, and BBQ-areas wait to be used. It's quite generous that the Australians pay for all this infrastructure despite many locals preferring to drive to a nice view point, or out to a jetty that is closed to traffic, remain in their cars and watch the scenery, while munching something from a take-away counter down...

Away from the coast, the Kepwari walking trail gives access to the "Lake Warden Wetland System" that connects uncountable smaller and bigger lakes. It's a very pleasant hike but when the days get warmer in spring, you have to be careful, because snakes consider walking tracks ideal places to warm up. Mostly, they disappear before you even see them. But if you see one, as happened to us (several times) it's much smarter to wait until it's gone, as most snakes around Australia are venomous and their bite may be painless yet deadly. However, humans are a bigger risk to snakes than vice versa. We admit that we hit more than one, as it sunbathed motionless on a road crest.

Lost, because of human interference, is also the colour of former Pink Lake. Construction of roads and railway-tracks have altered the circulation of waterflows in a way that the red algae can't survive. Another highlight remains: Esperance's 40km "Great Ocean Drive". This round loop connects the spectacular beaches, all with their own distinction. Some are framed by massive rocks, others have a lagoon or something like a reef, but all have unbelievably turquoise water and white sand. All have generous parking and are made accessible with good boardwalks and wooden stairs.



Ten Mile Lagoon: Esperance's pretty naturist beach

Esperance's turquoise beaches are a feast for the eyes and luckily, the town has reserved a stretch of white sand for those, who like to enjoy nature au naturel: Ten Mile Lagoon is a beautiful beach, protected from the crushing waves of the open sea by a turquoise-blue lagoon. The kilometre-long clothes-optional section is about 200 meters west of the parking lot. A real dream-beach with people. The nudist section of Ten Mile Lagoon is also accessible from the Eleven Mile Lagoon. From both parking lots, a long wooden staircase leads over the cliff to the water.



The access from Eleven Mile Lagoon to the naturist beach leads for a short distance over a large smooth rock. It's a bit further, but the beautiful, enclosed Eleven Mile lagoon makes the detour very rewarding. Furthermore, at this end of the naturist beach, we were also spoiled by seeing a pod of dolphins playing in the waves. Hence, our stage at Esperance and our visits to Ten Mile Lagoon, topped our Western Australia trip perfectly off.

Crossing the Nullarbor Plain: all manner of interesting things in the nil

Altogether, we've spent some 4 ½ very rewarding months in WA, our firm Australian favourite. We've been lingering and enjoying it until December 10, when we felt it was time to wave goodbye. We were going to cross the desert back to the eastern states, which meant across the Nullarbor Plain to South Australia.

When we left Esperance, we had 200 lonely road kilometres up to Norseman ahead of us, and from there, 1,200 very lonely kilometres to Ceduna. Conquering the Nullarbor Plain is not as adventurous anymore as it used to be in old times, but still something you should only attempt with a reliable car. It's not only a long, but nevertheless interesting 1,200 km

drive through the nil to Ceduna. Most motorists will probably continue another 800km through sparsely populated land to Adelaide. The Nullarbor is a mostly flat plain, predominantly almost treeless, but partly also forested, with nothing but every 100-200 kilometres a roadhouse and the odd farm (probably less than a handful).



Travellers, who conceive Confucius' wisdom "the journey is the reward", will find a good number of remarkable sights along the Nullarbor crossing. First of all, the road signs are much loved by keen photographers. It's not only the distances to the next destination that impress, but also the animals, motorists might risk hitting, if they take their eyes off the road. Apart from the omnipresent kangaroos and the usual emus, signs also warn of wombats, cows and even camels. Sure enough, humpy and jumpy animals are not the only risk. Long-haul drivers might face a Royal from above, a plane of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, to be precise, as road



sections of the Eyre Highway are regularly signed as emergency landing strip. Other objects from the sky might hit out of a sudden and without prior warning, like the American Skylab that crashed down to the Nullarbor Plain in 1979. Replica debris at Balladonia Roadhouse are commemorating the impact, despite an American (not the government) having paid the subsequent fine for littering!

However, the biggest risk is the lonely road itself. Dead straight sections of up to 146km, in combination with often severe heat, easily make drivers drowsy. Furthermore, most motorists want to get to their destination as quick as possible, so they only stop for petrol and take away food, which they munch down whilst driving

on. This time, we made three overnight-stops along the Nullarbor, but probably most others contend with only one, if they don't drive the 12h nonstop.

We much rather took time exploring the sights along the way. On the beginning of our trip eastwards, still on the Western Australian side, we stopped for the wheat fields before, and several salt lakes around Norseman. Impressive were also the moods and contrasts of the weather: 24°C upon leaving Esperance, rising 10°C to 15°C only 100km north and along the Eyre Highway crossing the Nullarbor. Despite having clear blue skies during our first two days, both nights, severe thunder-storms raged after sunset. As soon as the highway came closer to the sea, temperatures dropped dramatically, and the wind forced us into windbreakers.



We experienced the pricing and the standards at the road houses as changeable as the weather – though generally, it was better value than along the north-west coast. The best value-for-money place we stayed at, was the cheap and cheerful Madura Pass Motel. The newly renovated en-suite bathroom boosted even with some luxury that is (still) a real rarity in Australia: mixer taps!

Our last sight-seeing stop in WA, was at the old Telegraph Station in Eucla, where the remnants of the buildings are exposed to shifting sand dunes. This time, much more of the ruins protrude from the dune than during our visit 14 years ago. The bright white sand dunes looked also different, but beautiful as ever. Around here, we were also lucky to see a good number of emus, who probably came checking, whether their telegram arrived. To all appearance, it were fathers with their chicks. An Emu-Lady is only interested in family-planning until the eggs arrive. After that, she decamps.

As the next road house is placed besides the agriculture/quarantine-check point, those two complexes in the middle of nowhere were given the name Border Village. On the South Australian side of the Nullarbor crossing, we were soon greeted by the bold Dundas Cliffs. Several lookouts provide some breath-taking views of the up to 120m tall, sheer cliffs with their distinctive white and multi coloured rock layers. Unfortunately, the whales at the Head of Bight had already left for colder waters, but during our last visit, we've been spoilt with the sight of over 100 of those impressive giants. What we gave a miss, was a side-trip to Great Britain's former nuclear test site at Maralinga, now known as Ground Zero, as it would have involved two days of camping.



Shortly before reaching Ceduna, we observed more and more signs of civilisation. There was farmland again and in the village of Penong, boasting to be the windiest place in Australia, we marvelled at the dozens of windmills to pump water.

Back in Australia's densely populated south-east: still lots of space for all

After crossing the Nullarbor Plain, we were back in Australia's south eastern "corner", home to most Australians. Of the country's ~25 Million inhabitants, about 19 Million live in the costal belt between Adelaide and Brisbane. Another ~2 Million are inhabiting the, by Australian standard, rather urbanized costal belt, between Brisbane and Cairns. Knowing that more than 15 Million Australians live in one of the country's 5 largest cities (Adelaide 1,3 Mio., Perth 2 Mio., Brisbane 2,3 Mio., Melbourne 4,7 Mio., and Sydney 5 Mio.), adds to the impression of Australia being a huge, sparsely populated country, with a few densely populated agglomerations, where people live packed like sardines! That Sydney has even more traffic jams than London, we've learned from an Aussie, who knows both cities very well.

It's all relative, Australia's cities, including Sydney and Melbourne, are all so immensely spread out that some suburbs feel rather like hamlets in the countryside than as part of a big city. Most Aussies (still) live in a detached house. Though, more often than not, they are built so close to each other, the inhabitants could exchange groceries with their neighbour through the windows, if the yards wouldn't be separated by two-and-a-half-metres-tall walls. Obviously, as much as Australians love their own home with a garden, as much they do like their privacy.

We, on the other hand, loved it to find lonely (sometimes unsealed) roads with almost no traffic, even within the boundaries of Australia's largest cities.

The Eyre Peninsula: a charming tip of South Australia

Before diving into the hustle and bustle of Adelaide, we detoured for a few days to the Eyre Peninsula. Seeing the dense traffic in Ceduna, we definitely felt back in civilisation. This changed again as soon as we had turned off towards Port Lincoln, as there was even less traffic here than across the Nullarbor. Soon, it was time to overnight as the time difference between Western Australia and South Australia was 2 ½ hours. With a stroke of luck and a hint from the internet, we found a posh apartment at a caravan park in Streaky Bay. It was right on the beach, where pelicans abound. The Eyre-Peninsula's central west-coast deserves to be visited with plenty of time. Good gravel roads give access to breath-taking view points, predominantly high above the coast line. We were smitten by the vistas along Bauer-loop. Also Westall Way Loop Drive, offered a diversity of fascinating views of the seascape. Another good stretch of unsealed road leads to Point Labatt, where we were lucky to look down to a sea lion colony.



Before reaching Venus Bay, we popped in to Murphy's Haystacks, some bizarrely shaped rocks. They are so-called inselbergs and up to 7m tall. Back on the coast, we were awaited by more cliffs at Elliston, where we could witness big waves working to create new cliff formations. Probably it will take a few centuries, until a result is visible. However, the artwork placed along the cliff-top drive by human artists, were already shaped. Artists need to work faster, as their lifespan is limited...



With so much to see and so few places to stay in between, it was almost dark by the time we reached Coffin Bay, our next destination. Hoping the place name is not a bad omen, we moved into a nice apartment for the next three days. At least the food at the village's best restaurant was as good as it should be for a last meal...

Coffin Bay is a small holiday resort village with lots of holiday homes, but pre-destined as seniors' residence with coffins already included.... Whilst strolling along the pleasant sea front, we were often greeted by pelicans. However, once those clever birds realized we didn't have a fishing rod, they lost interest. The waters around Coffin Bay's protected harbour are said to be teeming with fish. Oyster farming is also big business and every restaurant, take-away and every shop has them on offer. In and around the village, it's not uncommon to see kangaroos and emus.



Lifting the coffin's lid, we left the bay and continued northwards, passing again endless wheat fields. Like all over Australia, also some of the wheat silos on Eyre Peninsula, have been colourfully painted and are now marke(te)d as Silo-Art, to attract visitors year around. We missed the one at Tumby Bay (north-east of Port Lincoln), but marvelled at those at the village of Kimba. Though the impressive "mural" stretches over five silos of 25m height, you can easily pass them (too) without noticing the artwork, as the silos are only painted on one side. In Kimba, Melbourne artist Cam Scale depicted a wonderful scene with a child standing in a corn field at sunset.



Back on the Eyre Highway, we passed another Australian peculiarity; if there is a mountain, it's often mined and transformed into a huge open-cut hole. Here it was Iron Knob, a 180m tall hill that is currently harvested and removed.

Adelaide Hills: German immigrants and funny Santa Clauses

Soon, we passed through Port Augusta, on the head of Spencer Gulf, where we had come through 6 months ago on our way to the Outback northwards to Darwin. This time we turned



southwards. Our next overnight-stop, the town of Port Pirie, was a pleasant surprise. It charmed us with its historic centre besides really bold (but bare) wheat silos and a large harbour. Thanks to its many shops and restaurants, Port Pirie gave us definitely a feeling of being back in civilisation, as it was the first populous place we've stayed, after the Nullarbor Crossing.

Moving southwards, we came across more vast wheat fields and even some salt lakes again. Driving via the village of Balaklava, we passed through the Adelaide Plains. Soon thereafter, we came into the Adelaide Hills, and stopped at strongly German influenced places like Lobethal and Hahndorf. They still celebrate Schützenfest and Oktoberfest. The beer drinking-part of it was certainly easily adopted by the Aussies. Especially Hahndorf is extremely touristy and everything is marketed around its German heritage.



What is sold as German bread and cakes or sausages however, was a fair bit adjusted to please Australian tastebuds.

Christmas was approaching and Hahndorf was decorated accordingly. Along the country roads, there were Santa Clauses in funny situations or funky attire placed in front of most houses, amusing passers-by. We saw life-size Santa puppets chopping wood, playing electric guitar, driving a tractor, sitting in a car full of Christmas presents, and much else.

Maslin Beach: Australia's first official clothes optional beach

Meanwhile, it was December 18th, 2018. Unexpectedly, we had been invited to a traditional X-mas celebration at our Adelaide's friends place. This remaining week was just perfect to indulge into a week's holiday to interrupt our travels, even more so, as the southern summer was about to coming into full swing.

We've sniffed out a deal for a posh apartment at a resort in McLaren Vale, some 10 kilometres in the hinterland. Here, we had it all at hand: uncountable shops and restaurants just around the corner, and Maslin Beach, one of Australia's most beautiful stretches of sand only a short drive away. As Adelaide boasts itself having Australia's first official unclad beach (also signposted like that) – Maslin Beach – it was just natural that we ended up there.



The long, shallow beach flanked by a fascinating multi-layered sandstone cliff, makes Maslin beach a real beauty that easily outclasses the nearby textile beaches. In 1975, when Adelaide's town hall officially declared Maslin Beach as the city's nude beach, it was probably selected because of its troublesome access below a sheer cliff. However, as naturism became more and more widespread and more popular, the town invested to construct a generous parking lot, an excellent, concrete access path, and even toilets and showers for the naturists.

During this trip, Maslin Beach was the most popular beach to bare it all, we've seen in Australia. In fact, it was the first naturist beach we've encountered more than 2 other beachgoers. On our three pre-Xmas visits, there were always some 50 – 100 other naturists present, meaning lots of space for everybody, who enjoyed this picturesque beach. It's probably a combination of Maslin Beach's sheer beauty, and the more liberal attire of (German influenced) South Australia that make this beach so popular...

Adelaide: traditional Xmas in a town that gets ever more cosmopolitan



On December 25th, 2018, we've continued to Adelaide, where we were invited to a traditional Australian Xmas-celebration at our friends Zebet and Peter's home. We've observed already during the weeks leading to Christmas that Australians celebrate it much more serious than some Europeans. People exchanging Xmas gifts at restaurants and in coffee shops, became daily sight. However, our friends exceeded our expectations, how Australians celebrate Christmas by far. We were about 10 invitees, but there was food and also nicely wrapped presents for many more. Loaded

with gifts and good memories of this unexpected Xmas experience, we gave Zebet and Peter a break for their family reunion, before enjoying their hospitality again in early January.

So, on the 26th, we've re-lodged to the city centre, where we had reserved a room. During our previous visits, we've experienced Adelaide, in comparison to the other big Australian cities, as a bit more laid back, less bustling and less cosmopolitan. However, this has meanwhile changed significantly! Though, the city is still laid back, it has now visibly more high-rise buildings in it's centre, as well as on the outskirts. Also the Asian community grew significantly, meaning the town boasts now an abundance of cheap and healthy eateries, from Chinese over Malaysian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian to Thai. We found basically anything our meanwhile spoiled palates appreciate... We love to dive into Australia's multicultural melting pots of cultures, cuisines and people from all over the world.



Rundle Mall is Adelaide's main shopping street. On December 26th, when "Boxing Day-Sale" took off, some shops were so packed with bargain hunters, we took a flight, even though we urgently needed to replace our camera. To us, it was just amusing to observe, how greed, in combination with the fear that the best bargains could be sold out soon, puts people into a mood of uncontrolled bargain hunting. We learned that most shops offer the Boxing Day specials until the end of the year. So, in the following days, we returned to much less crowded shops and bought what we needed.

The fact that Adelaide grew, does not really mean it's all urbanized now. Already on the city's edge, we've seen not only white cockatoos, but also Koalas. Our friends Zebet and Peter, with whom we stayed for another 4 days, after re-visiting the Barossa Valley, told us that they've had one of these cute bears residing in a tree in their garden for a while, and this in the midst of an urbanized area.

It was great to see Zebet and Peter again, and we enjoyed the time they shared with us very much. We had extremely interesting discussions and some delicious meals, homecooked as well as in Restaurants. Our friends showed us around some of Adelaide's sights, like Mount Lofty, Glenelg, Port Adelaide and the Bridgewater Mill. To detour a traffic jam, they once spontaneously decided to drive to Hahndorf, where they invited us to thigh knock, sausages and sauerkraut. So finally, our multi-cultural tour around Australia got at least culinary-wise, a touch of our own cultural background!



Coorong wetlands: an impressive saltwater lagoon

Leaving our friends on January 8, 2019, we drove off through the Adelaide Hills, passing rolling hills with farmland and vineyards. Next, we overnighed in the town of Murray Bridge. Here, we strolled again along the mighty Murray River, of which we have fond memories from 7 months ago, when we had followed its course further upstream. House boats abound also in Murray Bridge though here, they are not only used as floating holiday homes, but as permanent residences.

Following Princes Highway, we theoretically reached the coast again, but what came into sight, was quite unexpected and very beautiful: The Coorong Saltwater Lagoon. It stretches for 130km along the coastline and is protected from the thundering waves by dune-dominated Younghusband Peninsula. The area is a national park and we detoured to several of the many gravel roads, giving access to its wonders. Along the saltwater body, the colour of the lagoon sometimes appeared olive green, sometimes blue, but we also found a formidable pink lake.



Many Australians probably don't realize anymore how spoiled they are to live in a country with such an abundance of extraordinary natural beauty. Once a while, they find it necessary to build some artificial attractions. One of the most elaborate is the 17m high "Big Lobster" that awaits in Kingston SE. If it was real, it would be the only lobster capable of feeding more than a toddler! But we must admit, it's well made.

Sunland: disrobe in Robe ...

On January 10th, 2019, we arrived in Robe, a popular holiday resort village in South Australia. Bustling holiday resorts are not really our thing during peak season, but as Robe boasts two naturist resorts, inviting to disrobe, it was just

inevitable to visit one for another nudie break! Funnily, the two naturist heavens are situated next to each other: Sunland is long established and closest to the naturist beach and Lake Saint Claire.

We decided for Sunland, where we had already stayed 14 years ago, when it was the only choice. To our big surprise, we were welcomed by the same owners who founded Sunland in 1974. Pat is meanwhile a formidable 85 years old, but still extremely energetic – it seems naturism keeps her young, not only at hearth. Luckily, the owner's two daughters, and also their partners, are keen naturists as well, so one of the two couples are acting as caretakers.



Sunland is a pleasant, large naturist ground with altogether about 150 ha in size. We loved the extensive possibilities for walks, be they in the forest, or on the sand-dunes that were meanwhile a fair bit re-cultivated. Therefore, the biggest one, nick-named Big Bertha, looks now quite different than during our last stage. Before reaching the wide sand-beach, a sign warns of cars and 4WD traffic along the beach. It recommends sunbathers to put a red flag next to the towel, in order to be seen by the 4 wheeled beach cowboys. To us Europeans, traffic on Australia's beaches is the biggest annoyance. At least, along the naturist beach, there were not that many cars. Along a textile beach nearer to Robe however, beach traffic is another story. We were told by an enthusiastic local: "Wow, I really love the atmosphere in Robe during peak summer with some 2,000 cars along the beach"!

Though the naturist section in front of Sunland stretches for only 500 metres, you can walk for many kilometres in the buff, if you have a sarong or there-like with you, to cover quickly up, when a vehicle is passing. Even if the beach was lonely, we were never all alone, as parrots, and sometimes also flies and horse-flies abounded. However, the latter were easy avoidable by keeping away from the washed up sea-grass and succulent plants.



Colourful parrots and other birds awaited back at the campground, as did some wombats after dawn. Likewise, on most Australian naturist grounds, also the fauna at Sunland, spoiled us with a specie we hadn't seen before: Here it was a lizard called Bearded Dragon.

We stayed in one of the onsite caravans, of which some have onsite facilities. As we arrived on short notice, we got the owner's private caravan. This was very nice, and not really small, but we felt a fair bit cornered. Every motel room provides several times more space. We're certainly not born for camping, even if it's clamping!

Sunland is a very popular and well-equipped naturist ground. On New Year's Eve, they've had about 150 people staying. Ten days later, when we arrived, there were still some 40 – 60 guests present, which is quite a lot for an Australian naturist resort. Socializing is high on the agenda. We, however, had to give a miss to Morning-tea, as it interfered with our admittedly rather late breakfast, and we also gave a miss to the daily Happy Hour, as it makes us happier to socialize with the Australians outside happy hour.

Sunland is a perfect place to escape the Australian heatwaves, as the weather is much more moderate on



the coastline around Robe. And if it gets too cold, a sauna and jacuzzi invite to warm up, as a pool invites to cool down on hot days. We were impressed about the large campers-kitchen in the well-equipped clubhouse.

Apart from the extensive network of well-marked waking tracks, we also appreciated to stroll around Sunland's very own golf course. It's an 18 hole bush golf, though, the holes are in fact substituted by numbered building bricks. Well, with so many Wombats in the vicinity, a classical golf course with holes isn't working! Those "rocks on 4 legs", as wombats are dubbed, just dig the holes deeper and wider, to use them as burrows. However, those smart, cute animals take revenge for the fake holes: They use precisely the building bricks that substitute the holes, to deposit their cubed droppings on them!

Well, with such a lot to do and so many animals to observe, our time at Sunland passed in a flash. Our initial intended few days soon became almost two weeks. We like this little paradise and it was great to come back to disrobe in Robe again.

Highlights up until the end: final landmarks along our way around OZ



On January 21st, 2019, we set off to conquer the last part of our Australian discovery, before getting back to Melbourne where our tour had started. Many highlights were still awaiting, not only the famous Great Ocean Road. Very impressive was already the coastline around the holiday village of Beachport, where we whiled our time away along a scenic drive. No less awe inspiring were the sights at Mount Gambier, our next overnight stop. The truly deep blue water of Blue Lake fills the crater of an extinct volcano of about 1km in diameter. Crater lakes and

sink holes abound in this area. Descending the steps down to Umpherston Sinkhole, of which the cauldron has been transferred into a lush garden, is awestraking if you think it could have collapsed whilst you were standing atop.

Soon, we got out of South Australian and into Victorian territory again, continuing our discoveries around Portland. We visited the so-called petrified forest, of which scientists proofed it has nothing to do with what its name suggests. The tree trunk-shaped rock formations here, were just created by volcanic activities.

Next, we had a look at the Gannet colony at Point Danger (Australasian Gannets - *Morus serrator*). As we hadn't pre-booked a tour, we were not allowed to get that close to the birds, though thanks to our 30x tele lens, close enough.



Past Surry Estuary, we visited the weird and picturesque cliffs at Yambuk. Later, we had lunch at Port Fairy, another example of Australia's obsession with surreal superlatives. This village boasts to be the most liveable – the liveliest or whatever best – place in the world...

What is really great, is the nearby Great Ocean Road, with its countless colourful cliffs, sea stacks and natural arches along the coastline. The view-points on the western end (past Warrnambool, where we overnighted) were not crowded at all, despite the sights not being any bit less impressive. The closer we got to the best-known attractions, like the collapsed London Bridge or the Twelve Apostles, the harder it got finding parking. Luckily, we squeezed in just before the next



long week-end. Kilometres of roadside had already been temporarily fenced off to prevent roadside parking. As we reached the holiday resort village of Apollo Bay, accommodation was well booked and overpriced. After shopping around, we finally found an unofficial overflow-room at the excellent Youth Hostel. It's surprising, how few restaurants and accommodation are available along the Great Ocean Road. Apollo Bay is different, especially now in school holiday, it offers all vacationers want. The funfair and the countless fast-food and drinking places proved very popular, whereas the decent restaurants didn't seem to have made it into the hearts of John Sixpack and his family.

Back in Melbourne: two weeks in a cultural melting pot

On January 25th, 2019, we've made it back to Melbourne, where our Australian adventure had started exactly 11 months ago. Well, we were not really in the city yet, but in the outer suburb of Melton, some 40 km from the CBD. Here, we've found lodging at a huge estate, where the owners rent some of their spare rooms out to tourists. It was some 5 kilometres away from the village centre and we thought, it was the perfect place to base ourselves for a few days to do the technical inspection (road worthy certificate or RWC) that is required in the state of Victoria, before selling a car. Well, it was a perfect place to stay, but a bit too far away from everything, if you have to stay for 12 days.



That's how long it took until our very reliable, good car passed the inspection! First, we had to wait 4 days until the Australia Day long weekend had passed. Out of the blue, our car got a warranty recall to get an airbag replaced (only 2 days wait). Then, nobody had time to do the technical inspection. Finally, the workshop that is probably the most painstaking and most bureaucratic all over OZ, performed the check. We were absolutely flabbergasted, when we were told to replace the windshield because of sand-blasting.

Several locals just shook their head and recommended to do another roadworthy check with another garage. However, as a new RWC would have cost AUD 165, but a new windshield fully mounted AUD 180 (€ 113), we decided to replace it. By now, it was weekend again, and the glass-man was well booked, so there was another four days wait! Despite all those troubles, we had an add running in the internet and were very lucky to find a nice Indonesian family who agreed to buy our car, as soon as it had the roadworthy certificate. With AUD 5,000, it was a real bargain (all other private sellers advertised fancy prices for anything else than fancy cars). As we had gotten our beauty also for a bargain price, we had to write off AUD 400 (€ 250) only. Sure enough, we had to pay for unavoidable expenses like transfer, tax, registration, and insurance, but we had had very little maintenance costs.



So, on February 6th, we've made a last ride with our Ida (Nissan Tiida) to a nice lodging in Carlton, almost right in Downtown Melbourne. Only one hour later, we've exchanged money and keys with the new owners, a perfect final of another worthwhile tour around the fifth continent. Now, we had two weeks left to organize our onward trip to Asia, to work on our travel tales, and of course, to mingle with Melbourne's truly multicultural inhabitants. The Chinese share of the population was just celebrating lunar new year, so we could enjoy a top-class lion dance. In multi-ethnic Melbourne, its self-understood that the cultures blend: some lion dancers were of European decent, as many Asians became fond of bowling. We, on our side, indulged into the city's multi ethnical dining opportunities. Decent Italians were just at our doorstep (complete with vultures [touts] as in southern Europe's resort towns!), Asian eateries were a few hundred metres away, but basically anything we like to taste was at close range.



Final thoughts about our stage in Australia

When we had arrived in Australia a year ago, we thought we had seen it all, and a couple of months would be plenty, to revisit our favourite places. Only the car rental contracts, with their uncountable exclusions compelled us into buying an own vehicle once more, und subsequently, we've ended up staying once more for an entire year. Meanwhile, we know, it was the best decision! Once more, Australia offered us much more than we've ever hoped for. We were lucky to see uncountable landscapes, animals and plants we haven't seen during our extensive, previous stages. Despite adoring everywhere a lot, Western Australia proofed again to be our firm favourite.

We were also lucky, to discover more of Australia's hidden secrets, to visit giant research- and mining centres, as well as to learn more about the country's peculiarities.



Even while staying at naturist grounds and beaches to have a rest, we were often preoccupied not only by unique landscapes and plants, but also by Australia's sheer endless variety of wildlife unique to the fifth continent.

We also loved the freedom that we could only buy our onward tickets after we had discovered the country and were ready to leave. To our big delight, Australia has made a great leap forward also culinary-wise. It can now easily compete with the world's top-class dining destinations, even though, most Aussies probably still prefer their beloved fish & chips or burgers...

It was a sheer stroke of luck that destiny lead us to spend once more a year in Australia. Now we know, we should never ever say, we had seen it all, even if we know a country quite well. Australia spoiled us with unexpected encounters until our very last days, when we were lucky to see another specie of unique marsupials, we didn't come across anymore for 14 years: opossums, and this in a park right in Downtown Melbourne. Thus, we took another recollection with us, when we left Australia on February 22nd towards Asia...

Phuket March 2019

Brigitte & Heinz



more pictures on our Homepage

