

Melbourne, Australia – Day 47 Nov. 13:

At 6am we were awake when we heard the motor of the pilot boat for Melbourne Harbor as it came alongside the Amsterdam to drop off the pilot. It was daylight but lights from houses and towns on the shore could be seen. Melbourne was still a considerable distance further north in the harbor and it was not visible. We proceeded on to the port of Melbourne where we were docked at Station Pier by 10am, as scheduled. Melbourne had painted a huge “Welcome to Melbourne” sign on the Station Pier Terminal building and a picture of it obtained from Google Earth is shown on the right.



Today the Amsterdam was on the left side of the pier as viewed here and the ferry boat, Spirit of

Tasmania that serves Tasmania from Melbourne was on the other side. We could see the big white welcoming letters from Deck 9 on the Amsterdam.



Melbourne is near the southeast corner of the Australia continent as shown on the map on the left. At one time Melbourne was the capital of the UK Commonwealth Australian nation but in 1927 the capital was moved to Canberra which is also shown on the map. The stately national parliament building in Melbourne continues to be used as the parliament building for the Australian state of Victoria. Later today we would have a chance to see the parliament building first hand in a driving tour of Melbourne.

Today we had scheduled a private tour that was put together by our Cruise Critic and cruising friend, Pauline. She had arranged the following itinerary with “A Tour With a Difference”: Pick-up at the pier in 9 or 10 passenger vans, tour of a winery, visit of Sovereign Hill recreation of a mid

1800s Australian gold mining town, visit of a Wildlife Park featuring Australian animals,

with a finishing stop at the Eureka Tower where those so inclined could visit the 88th floor at their own expense and check out the view from the famous glass deck. This was all provided for a charge of \$135 Australian dollars payable by cash or credit card.

When the Amsterdam had been cleared by local immigration officials, we met with Pauline in the Atrium on Deck 3 and walked out to the head of the pier. There was the usual gauntlet of the quarantine signs and a contraband substance ‘sniffer’ dog to pass through but we made it without a problem.

Soon two nice looking green Mercedes vans appeared with “A Tour with a Difference” displayed on the side, as shown here.



son, James, drove the other van while James drove ours.



Without much fanfare we split up into two groups with 9 passengers plus driver in our van (one empty seat) and 10 passengers plus driver in the other van (one empty seat). Brian, who is co-owner of the company with his

We were on our way for a day of touring by about 11am. Before we left the port area we saw the largest stack of sea going shipping containers we had ever seen for a single company, Hamburg Süd. Obviously, Hamburg Süd has a good commercial relationship with Melbourne port business.



Speaking of business, we had not proceeded far when we got a picture of the prices of gasoline posted at a Melbourne station, as shown on the left. It's not crystal clear but we assume that regular gasoline is selling for 128.9 Australian cents per liter. Assuming 4 liters per gallon and the exchange rate of \$0.95 Australian for each \$1 USD the price of regular gas appears to be about \$5.43 per gallon at this station.

The two tour vans stayed together as we headed west on a freeway through green pastures and rolling hills dotted with blue gum and pine trees. The overcast sky was threatening rain but so far we were dry and visibility was good. James was very knowledgeable about the local history and passing scene. Through a microphone PA system he gave us a running commentary and answered questions all along the way at a comfortable level of sound.

After about 20 minutes we pulled in to St. Annes Vineyards for a little tour of the operation and some Australian wine tasting. The winery was in an idyllic rural setting with a rustic one story building used for a tasting and sales room.



The man and woman behind the counter quickly set us up with samples of whatever wine we wanted to taste.



Between tastes some of us just wandered around and explored the authentic looking wine casks and other decoration they had on display around the room. Our friends we met recently at a Cruise Critic luncheon, Dale and Marilyn (TRASHHAULER), from Belleville, Ontario are shown on the right enjoying the winery visit.



Meanwhile, Barbara was in to bigger things!



The grounds around the tasting room were fun to roam around. There was a large building with wine casks stacked outside and huge wooden casks visible through dusty

windows.

There were several peacocks roaming freely around the grounds, adding an exotic touch to the otherwise well-worn look of the place.



Unfortunately we couldn't get them to spread their tail feathers for a grand show. Apparently none of us looked enough like a female peacock. The wine we tasted was very good. A few people bought some of the wine and stashed it in the back of the vans.

From the winery we drove about another 30 minutes until we pulled in to the parking lot of the Sovereign Hills Village in the town of Ballarat. It started to sprinkle rain about this time so we got umbrellas in case the storm got worse. Fortunately the rain soon stopped and by the end of the day we were in sunshine.



We walked up the hill into the entrance where James bought the tickets for us. This large amusement park is built on the side of a hill and consists of a couple village streets with the architecture of the houses and stores representative of the 1850s time period when Australia had a gold rush in this area. The mining of gold was a major component of the early economic and cultural development in the countryside around Melbourne. Today we got a little taste of what a typical village may have looked like. The stores looked like movie sets from western movies in the US set in the 1850s time period. Here are a few examples.



We ate a small lunch in the Hope Bakery restaurant.



Harry, Barbara and Pauline take a break in front of the old Clarke Brothers Hardware Store.

Irene and Aldona preferred the Ballarat Times, as shown below.



After lunch a village guide took us for a walking tour of the village while he explained the technology used to mine and process the gold.

We completed our tour of the Sovereign Hill Village and returned to the vans for a short drive to the nearby Gold Museum which had been on the original itinerary. At this point there was a discussion about whether or not we go to the Gold Museum or skip it and go directly to the Animal Wild Life Park which was originally scheduled for after the Gold Museum. There had been a small display of gold forms and extraction technology in the Sovereign Hill Village that some of us had seen. However, Pauline rightly said that all people had agreed on the original itinerary and if one person wanted to go to the gold museum then that should remain as our itinerary. It was nearly 3pm and the day was passing so among the 9 folks in our van there was agreement that we should now go to the Animal Wild Life Park which was higher on most people's priority list than the Gold Museum. In the other van all but one wanted to skip the gold museum. To add some humor but make our point, our van folks started chanting "Wild Life !- Wild Life ! - Wild Life !" Our driver, James, sensing that he might have some misbehaving seniors on his hands, then suggested that he take us to the Animal Wild Life Park and start that tour. The other van could do the gold museum and join us later. This seemed like a great idea to us. About that time the person who was holding out for the gold museum apparently relented and with unanimity established we all headed for the Animal Wild Life Park. Fortunately this was all resolved without anyone in our van getting detention or demerits and there were no visible marks left on the holdout person in the other van.

It was just a short 15 minute ride to the Ballarat Wild Life Park. James got our tickets for us and we proceeded into the park like setting of the Wildlife Park. Shortly we were joined by a very knowledgeable young lady as our guide. She guided and facilitated our interactions with the animals around the park. The park was not busy with very many other visitors at the time so



we had our guide for the whole visit. Our guide is shown in the picture on the left directing our attention to some nearby Kangaroos.

We were soon engaged with Kangaroos, both in and out of the pouch. Some pictures of our initial Kangaroo experience are shown below.



The leg and long black ear sticking out of this mother's pouch looked like a problem but we had just seen the little guy crawl in so we knew he was alive. We were surprised that the mother would put up with a baby this big in her pouch. A nearby baby Kangaroo, shown below, that seemed to be on his own was about the same size as the one in the mother's pouch.



The Kangaroos were very friendly and didn't seem to mind being petted, especially if there was food involved.





Anne, Ray and Joann, with James in the background enjoying the feeding process.

Below: Pauline and friend.

Barbara and Pauline having a ball!



Even Harry stopped taking pictures long enough to pet one of these little guys.

There were some areas, as shown on the right, where the Kangaroos could go for a break when the tourist pressure became too much.

After saturating on Kangaroo contact, our guide's male assistant brought out a Koala for us to admire.

We were allowed to pet the Koala while it was held by the assistant. As shown below there were plenty of petters and the Koala didn't seem to mind.



On the left: Phil and Aldona get a close look.



Barbara checks off another event on her cruise agenda.



On the left: Sandy and Phil get in the action.



Mike and Barbara finish off the Koala experience.

As the Koala is taken off the stage our guide prepares us for the next event.



Next in our series of Wildlife Animal encounters was the Wombat. Our lady guide, exhibiting considerable strength, hoisted the young wombat up and held it so we could feel its fur, as shown below.



Marilyn exhibits a gentle touch as “A Tour with a Difference” owner, Brian, looks on.

Like kangaroos and Koalas, the Wombat is a marsupial with a pouch for the young. They can get a little bigger than this guy when fully grown.

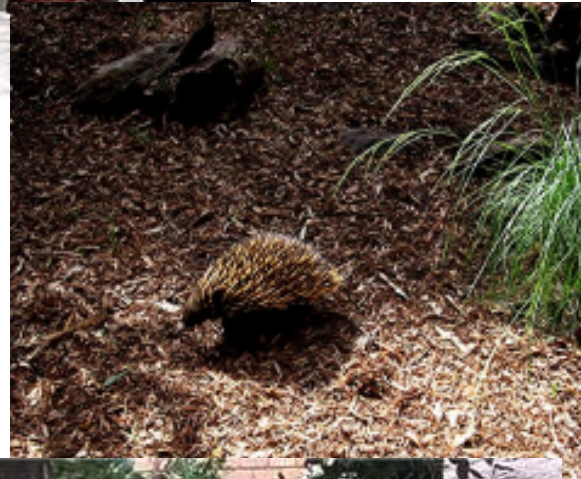


Barbara and Anne look a bit apprehensive about this “wild life” opportunity.

We finished the Wombat experience and walked past the Echidna exhibit. These Australian egg laying

mammals are covered with sharp spines so there was no petting opportunity here.

A picture that we got of an Echidna today is shown on the right.



We had been to several animal parks in Australia and carefully looked at their Tasmanian Devil exhibits but the little critters were always in hiding. There was hope that today would be different and we were not disappointed. Shown below are a couple pictures we got of the Tasmanian Devils.



The little creatures did not look nearly as fearsome as we had expected. It turns out they rarely attack other animals, including humans, and spend their time foraging for dead animals, bugs and other small critters on the forest floor. They got their name from early settlers who heard the frightening howl they can belt out and show of teeth when the mood strikes them.

We had finished up seeing the warm blooded animal exhibits so our guide took us on a quick tour of the reptile enclosures. The first place we visited was the home of the giant Tortoise. A couple of the prime inhabitants are shown on the right.



These guys were as big as a washtub and quite impressive.

There were a couple Alligators to see and we were content to observe these motionless animals through the glass windows of their enclosure.

Our guide next took us to the special enclosure where the snakes of Australia were housed. She assured us that they could not escape their cages so we cautiously filed by. The picture on the right is of a Western Taipan whose venom is more toxic per unit weight than any other snake, as described in the sign shown below. They aren't known to have ever attacked humans but we'll keep our distance anyway.



WORLDS MOST VENOMOUS LAND SNAKE
WESTERN TAIPAN *Oxyuranus microlepidotus*

SIZE: Total length 2 metres (6.6 feet)

HABIT: A quiet natured snake normally very reluctant to bite. The most toxic venom of all land snakes yet is not recorded at causing a single human fatality. Shelters in deep cracks in the ground and in burrows of the long haired rat (*Rattus villosissimus*).

DIET: Feeds almost entirely on Rats helping farmers by keeping their numbers down.

REPRODUCTION: Egg laying 12-20 eggs in a clutch.

One of the most curious snake exhibits was the albino Burmese Python. The snake had just shed its skin. The old skin was draped over some branches in its cage and the snake itself was a shiny white and yellow color. The scene is shown in the picture on the right.



At this point our guide offered to bring out a Boa Constrictor snake and let us feel the skin. Although a few people found better things to do with their time, about half or more of our group stuck around to feel the skin of a really big snake. The following pictures show the guide with the snake coiled over her shoulder and members of our group cautiously touching it.



Showing uncommon courage, Sandy nonchalantly lets the Boa Constrictor crawl across her wrist in this photo.



Not to be outdone, Anne wrestles with the snake while Bill makes a tentative offer of a helping hand.

With adrenaline flowing in observers and participants the snake house contact exhibit was brought to a close.



Outside the snake house, Anne assures Ray and Ira that their time was better spent resting outside than having a close encounter with the Boa Constrictor.



Our tour of the Ballarat Wildlife Park was coming to an end. Everyone thought it was a resounding success because of the

unusually open access we had to these Australian animals during the tour. Barbara was particularly glad that she had again made contact with a Koala and in addition, made friends with several Kangaroos. We got a picture of “A Tour with a Difference” owner, Brian and Barbara.

Here is Brian’s son, James, who was our guide for the initial part of the tour and is a co-owner of the company.



Cruise Critic friend Pauline (HALLPAU) had negotiated with “A Tour with a Difference” months before this day to set things up and it had gone beautifully. The \$135 Australian (\$14 USD) per person cost was definitely worth what we got in a well orchestrated tour of what we wanted to see during our Melbourne visit. We recommend “A Tour with a Difference” and will use them in the future

when visiting the area. Their website is www.atwad.com.au .

Although the main part of our Melbourne tour was over there still remained the optional visit to the Eureka Tower 88th floor to view Melbourne city at sunset. James asked us if we would like to consider a change to the itinerary. The entrance fee for the 88th floor of the Eureka Tower was \$17 Australian (\$18 USD) plus the hassle of actually getting into the building and up the elevator. James suggested that instead of the Eureka Tower visit he drive us around Melbourne downtown landmarks and point out the landmarks as they pass by. At the end of that tour he would return us to the port and the Amsterdam. We all thought that his suggestion was a super idea so we set out on that new itinerary.

The eastward drive from Ballarat back to Melbourne along the freeway was just as interesting as the westward drive this morning. The pastoral green grass covered hills, forests, and farmland were a beautiful sight. After about 45 minutes the skyline of Melbourne came into view and we homed in on that. Upon reaching Melbourne James took us by the Melbourne KRAFT plant where the iconic Australian spread, Vegemite, is produced. We stopped long enough to get a quick picture as shown on the right. With this visit accomplished we set out on the driving tour of Melbourne.



Near the Vegemite plant was a remarkable piece of art that had been incorporated into the freeway structure. It was what appeared to be a huge slab of metal with a hole through which the freeway passed, as shown in the picture on the right.

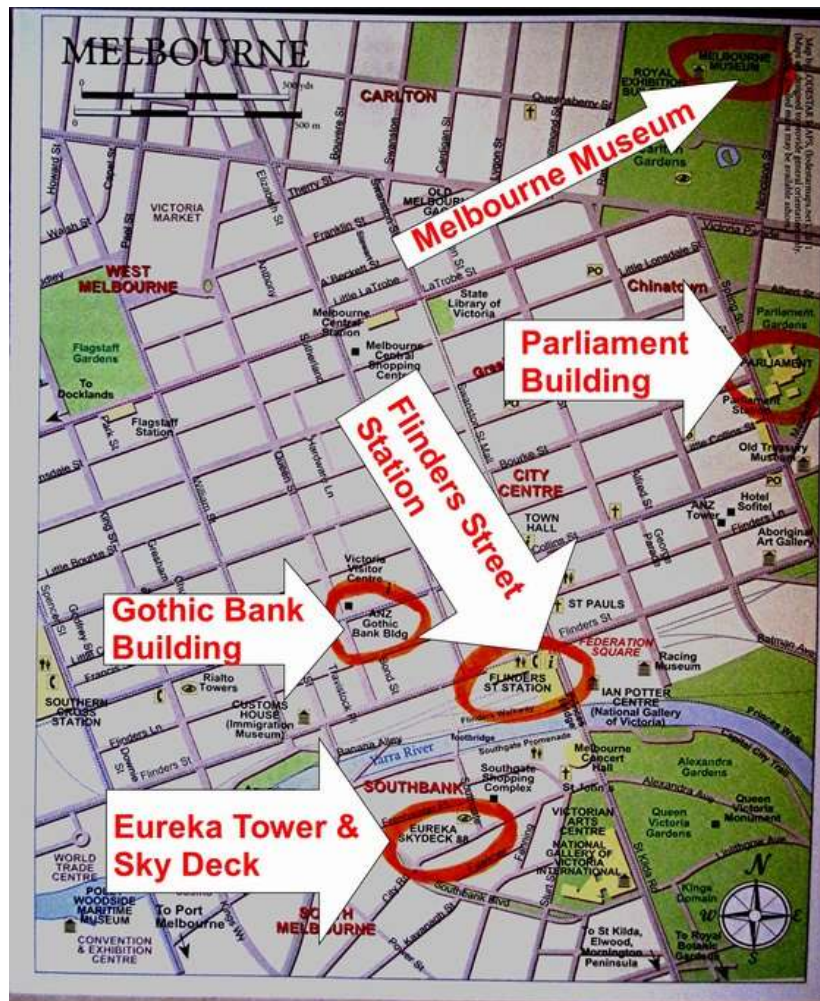


James drove around the artwork and we got another view of it as shown below.



This seemed like an amazing and expensive form of art and we were surprised it didn't show up on our tourist maps of Melbourne. This art gave us the message that Australians have an interesting outlook on life that may not always be a minimal pragmatic approach to life.

With regard to the more conventional landmarks of Melbourne, shown on the right is a map of the central part of Melbourne with some of the landmarks highlighted in orange color.



As James drove us around Melbourne he gave us a running description of the passing scene. We took pictures as we went along and shown below are pictures of the iconic buildings highlighted in the map above.

On the right this is a view of the Gothic ANZ Bank Building



On the left is the Eureka Tower which as the famous glass deck on the 88th floor where you can get marvelous views of Melbourne.

We proceeded past Flinders Street Train Station which has been an iconic structure linked to transportation all over Australia and the economy of Melbourne. There is a row of clocks over the main entrance on the street side. James said it was common for Melbourne people in the vicinity of Flinders Street Station to specify meeting associates “under the clocks” on Flinders Street Station as a location that everyone knew about. A picture of Flinders Street Station is shown on the right.



The next landmark we saw was the Parliament Building. In 1927 the capital of Australia was changed from Melbourne to Canberra. The Parliament of Australia had been meeting in the building still standing in Melbourne. Of course the parliament now meets in Canberra. However, Melbourne is



the capital of the Australian state of Victoria and the old parliament building in Melbourne continues to be used as a parliament building for the government of Victoria. The stately parliament building is shown in the picture on the left.

From the parliament building we drove to the Melbourne Museum which is housed in a beautiful structure shown on the right.



Our tour of Melbourne was completed and James drove us to the port area where we could see the Amsterdam at the dock. We said goodbye to James and the others in our van whom we had gotten to know much better during the day's tour. After having dinner in the Canaletto Restaurant on the Lido Deck we went to a special show put on by the Indonesian Staff in the Queen's Lounge. The hard working stewards and other Indonesian staff had been rehearsing for the show in their free time. Tonight at 10pm they finished their regular work shifts and then got together to put on a great show. At the end the audience that packed the Queens Lounge gave a standing ovation to the performers standing and smiling on the stage. The picture below shows the men doing a performance they called the "Monkey Dance".



During the last Cruise Critic luncheon, Marilyn (TRASHHAULER) introduced herself to us. She and husband, Dale, had just boarded the Amsterdam in Singapore. Today we had gotten to know both Dale and Marilyn better because they were in the same van with us during the tour of Melbourne.

It turned out that Dale and Marilyn were up and about when the Amsterdam got underway from Melbourne slightly before midnight. A lightning storm had come up across the city as they observed from a protected area on deck. Dale was taking pictures with his digital camera when he snapped the photo of lightning striking in Melbourne as shown below. When showing it to us later he was understandably proud of this unusual and marvelous photo although he acknowledged a bit of good luck was involved. He gave us a copy and we thought his lightning bolt would make a fitting ending photo for this sparkling and exciting day we had spent in Melbourne.



The Amsterdam quietly made its way out through the long channel leading to Melbourne. The ship turned left and continued on its way to Sydney, Australia, our next port of call.