



WELCOME TO DOWN UNDER: OZ
(Australia)

NORHTERN TERRITORY

I arrived in Darwin, the capital city of the Northern Territory in Australia. The only thing that felt familiar was the raining season that seemed to have travelled with me. Darwin itself looked like a rather unpleasant place. The combination of colourless houses, steady rainfalls, dirty streets, rushing people and homeless drunk Aborigines left me with a quite depressing impression and I was more than happy to be picked up by a friend of mine who had moved to Australia some time before. When we met she greeted me with the typical Australian “G’day mate!”. Soon I found out that the Australian accent is very interesting, they have funny sayings and different names for things, call Australia “Oz” and themselves “Ozzies”.



My friend lived in the wilderness of the green bush of Arnhem Land, the land of the Aborigines. She invited me to spend a couple of weeks with her in a tree house that we shared with a baby dingo. Underneath the house lived a python that every once in a while tried to eat the poor puppy. In the mornings I was awakened by the sound of buzzing insects, croaking amphibians and singing birds, every animal seemed to be active at a certain time. There were busy ants and huge termites everywhere and I was surprised by the height of the termite mounds.



The next “neighbour” was more than 10 km away and reminded me of the character of “Crocodile Dundee”. He gave me a short but nonetheless impressive introduction to Australia’s quite deadly wildlife: I had to watch out for numerous venomous spiders, snakes with lovely names such as “death adder” or “black adder”, zillions of insects and crocodiles, just to mention a few.

Nevertheless I was interested in doing a 3 days bushwalk together with my friend. This turned out to be quite an adventure because due to the high grass it was sometimes impossible to find the signs that marked the right way. Also, in order to survive the walk I kept my eyes pinned to the ground because I didn’t want to step on a snake or anything else lethal and therefore didn’t really feel as relaxed as I would when hiking in Austria.



We met a Python, two wild pigs and several wallabies and kangaroos. Once we had to cross a river that was quite swollen due to the rainfalls. We knew that there shouldn’t be any crocodiles because the altitude in this area was quite high and I had never heard of a crocodile climbing a mountain. But still, at my first try I was nearly washed away because my feet couldn’t touch the ground. Luckily I had tied myself to a tree and therefore could hold on to the rope while my friend was trying to pull me

back. Finally we were successful and reached the other shore. I was completely soaked and so was my rucksack - I guess I don't need to mention that my camera didn't survive the action. But scarier than anything before were the leeches that we suddenly discovered all over our body which used us as their natural food source. Strangely enough, I really enjoyed this adventure but was ready to move on to somewhere dryer.



OUTBACK

There's a highway called the Stuart Highway which runs more or less straight from the north to the south of Australia. It used to be a very important connection but nowadays it's not very busy anymore as most people prefer to travel the several thousand kilometres long distance by plane. But it is used by a lot of truck drivers that deliver different goods to the most isolated areas in Australia. I wanted to explore the outback and decided to hitchhike in order to manage the long distance within short time and without having to pay for the transport and was lucky to meet quite nice truckers. They were happy to have some company and I enjoyed the view from high above, seeing why some truckers feel like kings of the road.

Arriving in Alice Springs, the red heart of Australia I had to deal with the climate conditions again, unbearably hot temperatures and dry desert sand this time. I had heard of the "West Mac Donnell Ranges", a mountain range in that area. There are some trails which are quite popular among hikers and I decided to walk a few miles along the Larapinta -Trail. Soon I found out that the desert was not that dry at all and it was full of life. Every once in a while I had to cross small streams, I met buffalos, dingos, birds and zillions of flies that preferred to crawl into my eyes, ears and nose. During the days water was my main source of living, I drank several litres. At night time the temperatures were quite humane and sometimes, when I felt safe enough without my tent I just slept under my mosquito net and watched the stars that seemed so much more impressive in the southern hemisphere

On the last day of the hike I ran out of water and felt uneasy about that. I couldn't decide whether I preferred dying from thirst or dirt, but eventually made my decision and boiled some water from a muddy puddle to kill all the bacteria in it. I drank it and found it delicious! Finally in the evening I reached a "gorge", a kind of small canyon filled with water and enjoyed a swim, appreciating the water like hardly anything ever before in my life!

In order to learn more about the culture of the Aborigines I went to the "Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park", maybe the most sacred place of the Aborigines. "Uluru" is their name for Ayers Rock, and I was interested in experiencing the myth of this massive sandstone which has a circumference of 9.4 km and is home to mammals, reptiles, birds, frogs, more than 400 different types of plants and which even has underground springs. I was frankly shocked when I arrived in the resort: mass tourism has changed the once deserted sacred site into an artificial modern city with shopping malls, expensive hotels with big pools, pubs, beauty salons and a lot of more luxury things which the so-called civilized world think they need in order to be happy. Ironically, right there in the outback, my mobile phone had the best reception of all the places I visited in Oz !



I went to see Uluru at sunset and was deeply impressed by the power of the place. Forgetting about all the other tourists (there is nothing like a low season at Uluru!) I just stood there watching the

evening sun colour the rock in different shades from orange to almost purple, playing with the shadows that seemed to make the rock alive.



SOUTH AUSTRALIA & VICTORIA

Finally I arrived at the village of Warrnamboole at the south coast which is where the “Great Ocean Road” starts, probably one of the most beautiful coastal roads in the world! It’s famous for its rock formations in the sea which have been created by wind and water erosion over millions of years and the beauty of the dramatic scenery captured my eyes immediately. There are also some beautiful lighthouses because in earlier times the cliffs and narrow stretches of water claimed a lot of ships and lives. There are stories of numerous ships that sank and sometimes when the

tide is low you can see parts of shipwrecks in the water.

The area has also some of the world’s top surfing spots such as Bells Beach and sometimes I stopped from travelling, strolled along the beach until I found a place to sit down and enjoyed watching the waves and the surfers. For a couple of nights I camped in “Otway National Park”, a rainforest nearby which is rich of flora and fauna. I saw different parrots, wallabies and kangaroos, possums and even koalas and felt like being a fairy in an enchanted wood.



I was almost sad when I finally reached Melbourne and later Sydney which are both great cities. But for me Australia was all about the wildlife and I missed the nature. So I was happy to find some of it even in the cities. Both cities are situated by the sea and I never felt too far away from the next beach. And should you ever want to see flying dogs, just visit the botanical garden in Sydney!

Questions on the text

- Where can you see parts of shipwrecks in the sea when the tide is low?
- Why was the author lucky when she tried to cross a river?
- What is the Aborigines' name for Ayers Rock?
- How do the Australians call themselves?
- Where can you watch flying dogs?

Discussion Topic

What things are absolutely necessary when you go on a bushwalk? List 5 items you would pack into your rucksack, compare them to your neighbour's and together agree on 5 items you would both take along.

Hitchhiking is quite a dangerous adventure. If you were a globetrotter – would you dare to get on a truck without knowing the trucker? And imagine the trucker's side – what kind of hitchhikers would you prefer as a company and what kind wouldn't you like to have with you?

Essay Writing

After the American War of Independence, Britain tried to establish new penal settlements to replace the north Atlantic colonies. The First Fleet of 11 ships with 1500 aboard, half of them convicts, arrived at Botany Bay in January 1788. Sydney emerged from this first British penal settlement.

Imagine you were a British convict coming to Australia in the late 18th century. After having fulfilled your penalty you get the chance to start a new life in a completely new world! Write about this adventure!