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# The Wonders from Down Under

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By Trey Burns





As the Journey Begins

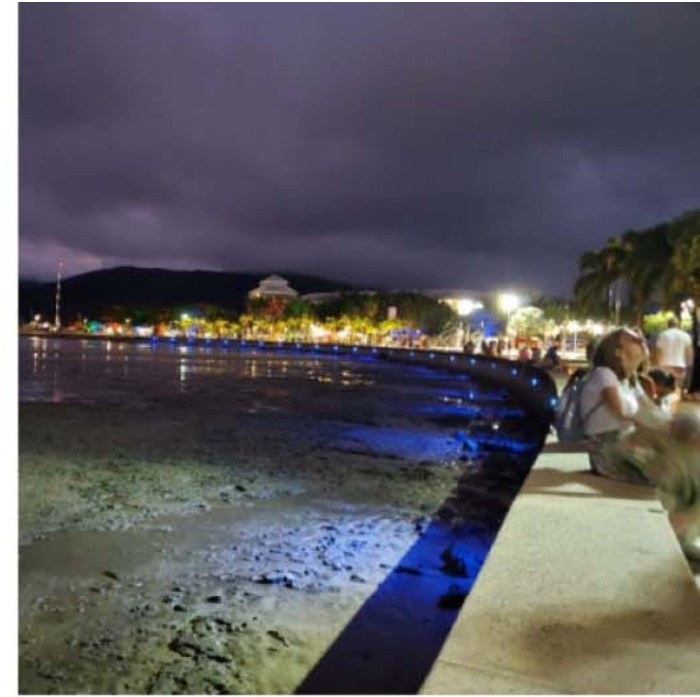




I had seen many different movies, TV shows, and other media about Australia. I thought I knew what Australia was about. It was full of dangerous animals, people with cool accidents, and was dominated by stretches of desert like wastelands known as the Outback. I have never really flown for more than 30 hours and I know no one on this trip, yet I have a good feeling I'll be able to make the most of it.



Upon Arrival



Today was definitely full of firsts. I wouldn't recommend spending 30 hours of your life flying but the people on the trip made it fun. Between the four different airports, and five in-flight meals, I did manage to make some connections with the other students. I found that most of them had completed the same course schedule I had, were really in love with biology, and were just as excited as I was. It was very reassuring. From what I've seen of the city of Cairns and some parts of the countryside of Northern Queensland, I couldn't be happier to be here.



## Stepping Into the Wild

This place as continues to amaze me! There are fruit bats in the trees, we are surrounded by the jungles, and this city feels so alive. Paul, our one armed tour guide, did a wonderful job educating me on the rich farming history of this area and just how diverse this region is. Though the surrounding environments are full of interesting things, I've also begun to explore the city of Cairns. There are so many stores, restaurants, and even this really cool placed called the Night Markets.







Top of My Bucket List



Today was one of the best days of my entire life. Scuba diving the Great Barrier Reef has been a dream of mine ever since I was very young. Being someone who loves the ocean as much as I do, this was the pinnacle of anything I could have done. It didn't fail to impress. I can only describe the experience as both breath taking and a feeling of accomplishment. From the beautifully colored fishes and corals to other forms of abundant life, it was truly a wonder of the world. These are truly two days that I will never forget.





Face to Face with Danger

Spending today at Heartley's Crocodile Farm was way more than I expected. This swamp turned crocodile farm and conservation center was one of the coolest places I had seen. We were shown the breeding pits behind stage, given a boat tour through the croc infested swamp, and even got to feed some wallabies. It had a little bit of everything, including a photo opportunity with some of their koalas. This place has spent the last 40 years humanly producing croc leathers so that wild populations of salt water crocodiles could become stable again.





## Hidden Gems of Cairns





## Our Journey South

We started the second half of our trip in Melbourne today. This city is huge! The buildings are really tall with unique architecture, there is a really high diversity of people, there are so many cool street performers and artists, and there is no way I could see everything this place has to offer. It's a little overwhelming. I'm excited to explore this place and experience the many things we are scheduled to do.







Going on a Bush Walk



Today we traveled to the You Yangs Eucalyptus Forest to stalk wild koalas and kangaroos. We met up with citizen scientist Jene, one of the most inspiring people I had ever met. She started off as someone who enjoyed running through the forest to being the leading researcher of the forest. All of the data she collected over the years has been used by other scientists and it was really heart warming to see how much she cares. Other than that, seeing wild koalas and kangaroos was really exciting. After we helped get rid of invasive weeds, we then spent hours just quietly following a family of koalas and stalking kangaroos in the tall grasses. Made me feel like a real Australian.





## March of the Penguins



Our trip to Philip Island was tied for the best thing we did on the entire trip. Not only is this island extremely beautiful this time of year, but it also home to thousands of fur seals and the Philip Island Little Penguins. These blue-ish penguins don't get taller than two feet and are absolutely adorable. Watching them come in from shore at night to feed their children was really a once in a life time experience. This a really incredible way to way to spend one our last days of the trip.





Hellbent on Conservation

Since today was our last day, my friends and I decided to take a trip to the Melbourne Zoo. This place, aside from being one of the most highly rated zoos in the world, was really inspiring. This place, and most of Australia, are very dedicated to the preservation of their country. From well organized public transportation, easy to use recycling practices, and the amount of government funds that go into their environment it is very easy to see just how much Australia cares for the world around them.

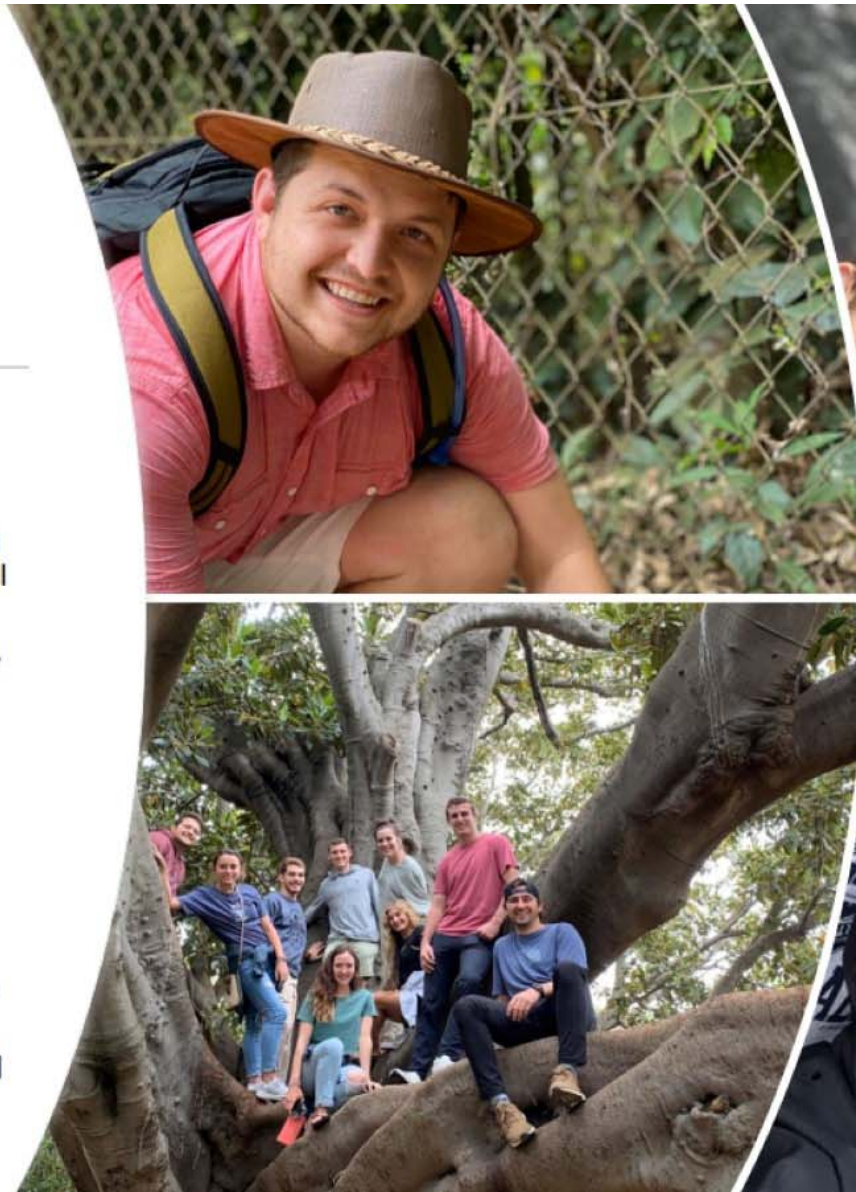




G'day and No Worries!



If I said I wasn't nervous going into this trip then I'd be lying. Spending two weeks in a new place with no one I knew was a little intimidating. Not only did I not let those thoughts phase me, I made amazing memories, life long friendships, and felt my perspective of my world expand more than I ever thought it would. I'm so thankful for my time in this beautiful country and will be sure to come back many more times over my lifetime. Australia is definitely a country I fell in love with and some place I'll hopefully, one day, call home.





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