

FEBRUARY 9 - SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA -ARRIVAL

I wake about 2:00 AM, probably because I could hear the crew getting ready to dock in Sydney or the slow downed speed of the ship and lack of the constant movement you get used to when out to sea. I see some lights on a hill passing by. I get up and go out on the balcony to see the arrival. The weather is warm and a sea breeze brushes over me. It's a welcome breath of fresh air. I don't see much yet. We pass a few buildings and I can make out the silhouettes of dark unlit hills because of the glow of the city behind them. I can't believe how close we are to the land, this channel seems very narrow for a big ship like this.

Our view is the starboard side and so if we are coming in the way I think we are we will not see the Sydney Opera house. I see more and more lights but what I notice the most are the birds following the ship along the water line. They are talking to each other. Have no idea what they



are talking about but it is beautiful and dreamlike. It's like a welcoming committee. They fly the length of the ship to the bow and then turn to come back to the stern in a rush and then turn and fly slowly to the front again. Occasionally one spots a fish, it will flutter in place which catches the attention of the others who all start squawking and heading towards him. He quickly dives, the flutter in place was signaling that he sighted a fish. It was a mad rush now to dive, get the fish, and get away before the others steal it away from him. He was successful in getting away and disappeared into the dark sky. The others gave up, came back and got back in line again, back into their dream like pace alongside the waves from the ship.

Soon I see the silhouette of the old Sydney bridge, almost as important a landmark to Sydney as the Opera House. I also see an eery lit-up smily face below it. It is a very strange sight that I was not prepared for. I finally realize it's the landmark of the old amusement park, Luna which has been around since 1935. Luna has the world's last remaining and oldest authentic 1930s fun house. We are coming closer and closer to the old iron bridge. Surely I think we will not be going under it as it looks too low but the captain continues on and clears it. I'm sure they must consider the tides to make sure they clear it as it seem precariously close. The ship continues slowly meandering left and right like a snake, making it's way back into the bowels of Sydney harbor and finally we dock at White Bay Cruise Terminal.

Viking had announced a surprise for everyone since this was an unpredicted stop on the itinerary. They said they have made arrangements for everyone to take a complementary boat tour of the harbor today. It was a nice thought but we are not interested in a boat tour after 3-4 days at sea. So once we are able to get off the ship, off we go.

SYDNEY CITY

We take the shuttle bus into the city. The city of Sydney has arranged to run a shuttle bus all day back and forth taking the Viking passengers to and from the city. My camera is having a



disc problem so the first thing on our agenda today is to find a camera shop to see if we can get a new card to resolve the problem. If it doesn't fix it we will have a more serious problem to deal with.

Wow, Sydney is spectacular! It's a mix of modern and old and it all melds together beautifully. There are amazing building's, bridges, roadways and waterways. Soon we are dropped off at the designated shuttle bus drop off location not too far from downtown. The buildings are jaw dropping. One is brightly colored in primary colors, others are modern, different than what we've seen elsewhere and others are 19th century with amazing friezes and decoration. We walk about 3 city blocks up hill and turn right on York Street. We stop to look at the map to get our bearings. The shuttle bus lady marked on our map an area with shops and the most likely place to find a camera shop. As we were standing there figuring out the map, a woman asks if she can help us. We explained what we were looking for and she tried to look up a camera shop on her phone that she thought would be what we need, called George's Camera, but couldn't find it so sent us down the street to a small photo shop that she knew of and said the owner, if he doesn't have what we need he will guide us to where we need to go.



So we walked about a half a block to his shop. He didn't have what we needed but sent us to another shop, another block away. The next one was Chinese owned and had all second hand resale camera parts. He had a card but it would be \$600. About \$300 American. Too much. He recommended another camera shop down another block and around the corner.

We are in a very nice area; local Apple store, Cartier, etc. so enjoying our search for the camera card. We see George's Camera, the camera store that the lady recommended. It was a great camera shop, had everything you'd ever want or need and had the card we needed and at a suitable price so we purchased it.

We walked outside, now that our errand was done, we were purely just sightseeing.

We walked outside and down George Street which is like the spine through the city and ends at the waterfront where all the ferry's go out. We then turned on to Martin plaza where the GPO is, the General Post Office. This is one of the finest buildings I've seen, designed by James Barnett, a colonial architect in 1866. It faces onto a beautiful pedestrian square called Martin Cenotaph. On Bridge Street the side of the



building seems attached to the GPO by a long ornate colonnade. The building's surface is sandstone and has 48 facades with depictions of explorers and legislators who "promoted settlement." It is stunning. Today this building, instead of its original use as a Lands Development Building is under restoration to preserve its heritage and has been converted in into a luxury hotel.

Street landscape structures are filled with flowers and well kept. The city is very clean and rare to see any homeless. You feel very safe.





There is so much in this area to explore but to see more we will have to return on our return trip in a few days. We decide to venture out and take the tram to the harbor. It's like a monorail.



So simple to use. You tap a box with your Apple phone as you get on and tap another box at your destination as you get off. That simple. Why aren't we so smart? It was a result of Covid I was told as the hands free movement became necessary.

WATERFRONT

We get on and lickety-split we are at the last stop at the end of George Street. We got off the tram and stood off to the side to study the map again. A tram worker came up and asked if he could help us. He directed us down toward's the harbor. All you have to do is open a map in Australia or New Zealand and people come right up to you and ask how they can help.

The harbor is bustling. So many people, all nationalities it seems, and ferries and coming and going, and street performers and crowds taking the walk along the waterfront, called the Circular Quay, to see the amazing Sydney Opera House, the massive outstanding architectural landmark of the city. We began to walk in the direction of the Opera House.

It was mind boggling just taking in all the activity. The water was rising and swelling with the movement of the ferries. People with tattoos, sarongs, even aborigines have gotten into the act of street performance. One thing we haven't seen much of, that I'm sorry to say we see too much of in the US these days, was homeless people and filth. This city is clean as a whistle and beautiful.

Across the harbor we can see the brightly colored fun house face of the Luna park that we passed in the middle of the night. The big smiley clown face is quite a sight.

There is an old schooner out sailing, along with ferries of all sizes, shapes, and age transporting people back and forth. People are walking un top of the old Sydney Harbor Bridge too! These Aussies are quite something.

Amongst all of this activity, the most obvious competition to the scene is the gigantic cruise ship by "the Rocks" area. It is so huge that it really almost swallows up the ominous Sydney Opera House.

I just can't believe they allow cruise ships to dock here in this amazing harbor. It completely blocks any view of the opera house from the "Rocks" area. You also cannot see the "Rocks" which is historically significant to this harbor as often referred to as the "birthplace of modern Australia". It is here that in 1788 where the First Fleet landed with convicts, soldiers and officials declaring it a British colony. It is today dwarfed and hidden by this massive cruise ship that takes up the harbor.

We continued walking along the waterfront called the Circular Quay towards the area where the Opera House is. We pass many outdoor cafes along the way and tall apartment buildings overlooking the Quay. As we come around the corner we get our first glimpse of the amazing Sydney Opera House. It is really breath taking.

It's hard to imagine this harbor without the Opera House. It has only been here since 1973. It is Australia's most popular tourist attraction. People from all over the world are here to see this magnificent building. They are taking selfies in front of it. It is truly revered by all who come to see it.

We are tired and hungry by now and decided we should pick one of these harbor side cafes to get a bite of lunch. We spot a little cafe with white umbrellas and outdoor seating right by the water's edge with a good view of everything.

CONTACTLESS SOCIETY

You seat yourself apparently as the service person nodded us towards the seating area saying to pick out any table. We pick a good table and read the menu. Oyster, hamburger or steak and frites pretty much sums it up. They don't come wait on you apparently. There is one of those digital squares QR codes on the table top. Larry gets out his phone and is trying to figure it out. It requires their restaurant APP which was so slow to load. We sat there for 20 minutes trying to make it work but was so slow we gave up. We don't know if it was our phone or what. The weirdest part of it was they had a customer that wanted to order some food but couldn't because of their crazy APP and no one is around to help you. It is another one of these contactless things as a result of Covid. You don't talk to anyone, they just bring the food. We gave up finally and left.

We walked across to another restaurant and sat down. This one thankfully had waiters that talked to you. It turned out to be Chinese food which is not something we would've picked but at least we could communicate with a person. So ordered up a few items and sat back to watch this amazing theatre of people walking by. Turns out the Chinese food was the best I've ever eaten. Sooo good.

THE ROCKS

We were pretty tired but decided to walk back to the other side of the Quay to the "Rocks" area. You could just spend the whole day in this area people watching. I'm sure it was also very busy because of the ginormous cruise ship. We stopped at a park to sit and rest. We watched with amusement as an Australian Black Ibis' were hanging out here, interacting with





people like they were meant to be there. Just like city folk. It was hilarious.

We walked past the cruise ship and many passengers were walking down the waterfront with their suitcases in tow heading towards the ship to board. Taxis', one after another, were dropping off more passengers all getting on the huge ship.

We headed up the hill of the Rocks to the main road and where cafe after cafe are lined up in the streets with planter barriers to protect the customers seated at table from the cars driving right by. I'm sure it must be left over from the Covid Days and just never went back to no dining or sitting on the street. It looks like such an interesting area but time to head back to the ship. We had walked so much today and time was running out.



We hailed a cab and took the easy way back to the ship.

LEAVING SYDNEY HARBOR

That evening we went out on the back deck to watch the captain take the ship back out of the harbor. During the day while we were in the city another cruise ship came in and docked behind us. They were in front of us now so they went out first. It was a beautiful evening, warm and clear.

The city scape is amazing with a complex collaboration of modern, old, bridges and water activity. Just so much to take in and look at.

We slowly back out with the help of two tugs with lines tied to us to give us an extra pull here and there. We go out the same path we came in and that is going under the Sydney Harbor

Bridge. We pass the smiley face at Luna Amusement Park and the magnificent Sydney Opera House. Ferries are coming and going. An old schooner with sails up goes by. The crew and





passengers wave at us.

As we head a little farther out the harbor we are bombarded with sailboats. They are all around us. It's a regatta and there must a100 boats sailboats or more. It is a spectacular sight! A tug is celebrating too spraying big spouts of water and doing twirls in the bay. It looked like he was doing a show for us because he was right beside us but more likely it was for the regatta. It was quite a momentous and memorable send off for us.



