

## Pat Arrowsmith - Australia 2009

In April I took my first ever trip Down Under, somewhere I had wanted to visit for a long time. With one son living in Dubai and one travelling in Australia, Emirates was the obvious choice. We were able to take advantage of a very special offer in business class, courtesy of the recession and our only problem now is how we will ever be able to fly economy again!

Emirates provide chauffeur driven cars to and from the airport and together with the business class lounges, lie flat beds and impeccable service, it proved to be the journey of a lifetime.

Dubai is a building site but still a very exciting city. With luxurious hotels, the World's tallest building, enormous malls complete with aquarium and ice rink combine with the old part along the Creek with its Souks and Mosques to make an amazing city break.

This was our second visit and the change was staggering. We stayed at The Madinat on Jumeirah beach complete with abbras (ferry boats) to take you on the waterways of the hotel to the various restaurants available! It felt like we were in Disneyland or Vegas!

Our next stop was Sydney where we stayed on Circular Quay, near the Rocks area with many restaurants and markets and where the convicts were accommodated in tents 200 years ago. Fortunately for us time has moved on and we stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel with its views of the harbour and opera house. A perfect location to explore the city by open top bus or take one of the many ferries operating out of the harbour. No stay in Sydney would be complete without a trip to the Blue Mountains and best experienced on a small eco tour in small custom built vehicles visiting Katoomba, riding the World's steepest scenic railway, even stopping for breakfast with koalas on the way. Next stop was Port Douglas, an hour's drive north of Cairns and a more peaceful location for visiting Cape Tribulation, so named by Captain Cook, the Daintree forest and Mossman Gorge, keeping eyes peeled for saltwater crocodiles on the way!



Another very interesting tour is to Kuranda enjoying spectacular views on the region's oldest railway as you journey through fifteen hand cut tunnels to this



colourful village, returning via the Skyrail, gliding silently over the rainforest canopy to possibly enjoy an aboriginal cultural show at Tjapukai with a chance to learn how to throw a boomerang and play a didgeridoo! (I did say possibly!) I will not be changing my profession my family have decided!

Our two trips out to the Barrier Reef were amazing, even in torrential rain! The first was on a catamaran, Silverswift, taking us to the outer edge of the Reef so we could to snorkel (or dive) at 3 different locations. The second was on Ocean Spirit which took us to Michaelmas Cay. Perfect for snorkelling in shallow waters off the glorious white sand beach. An added extra on this vessel is the opportunity to try out the glass bottom

boat where you feel like you are in a submarine, enabling you to see the beautiful array of coral and fishes whilst keeping dry!



Port Douglas is a lovely place to stay. Sophisticated yet relaxed, with various types of accommodation, excellent restaurants and bars. I even tried cane toad racing and would have won if I hadn't stopped to worry about another toad I had stood on!! He did live to die another day!

Our last stop was Brisbane where we took a ferry over to South Stradbroke Island. A colleague had recommended we stay at a resort called Couran Cove. This was an excellent eco resort with a marina, rainforest and superb beaches. The only incident to spoil our stay here was me falling off a bike, down a ditch, whilst cycling through the rainforest and cracking a couple of ribs. I should

point out that it was a three wheeler so will stick to driving my car in future. That has four!

Our journey home was as enjoyable as the outbound, starting off in the dedicated lounge with delicious food and drinks before boarding the plane to sleep the hours away. The business class lounge in Dubai (as in other cities) has massage chairs to ease stiff muscles and showers to freshen up for the last leg home. A great tip if flying Emirates from Dubai is to sit on the left hand side of the aircraft to get a fantastic view of The Palm and the World as you take off. With a chauffeur driven car waiting at Gatwick to take us home it really is the way to fly!