

Thoughts about Melbourne (2000)

That's Melbun (as the natives say it). Well, it turned out to be a long trip this time. I was glad that Janice got to come along. At first, I couldn't get tickets (via frequent flier miles) to come on the same day as me, but a couple of days prior to the trip I tried and was successful. Needless to say that put a little crimp into her planning activities, but everything worked out.

Due to the astounding performance of the satellite based navigation and communication systems on the 747-400 (my product), QANTAS is able to offer Los Angeles to Melbourne direct. Missing that 2 hour layover in Auckland, New Zealand was nice. We arrived in the morning (Saturday) and after a couple of hours wait (we were early arrivals) our room at the Hilton by the Park was ready. That first day we didn't do much but groan and rest. The weather, however, was spectacular.

On Sunday, we went to a Baptist Church in the heart of Melbourne. It just so happened they were installing a new pastor that day A WOMAN PASTOR (which is a little liberal for the Baptists). It was fun sitting through the ceremony and Janice (of course) introduced us and talked to her a bit. (Note: A week later there was a big article and pictures in the paper about her...all good things). After church, Janice got to go on a tour of the new Melbourne Air Traffic Control Center. After her vast experience, from looking at the center in Prestwick, Scotland; she noticed this one was state of the art. That night we went down to the "biggest casino in the southern hemisphere" with some airline guys. They went there for the cheap buffet dinner; it was cheap...but not so hot. We, of course, went there for the gambling. Being high stakes gamers, we headed directly for the 5 cent "pokies" (Australian slot machines). We ended up about even and had a great time.

Now I was in Melbourne for three meetings. The first part of the week, Boeing was helping Ansett airlines host a meeting on economics. Since all of my engineers are on strike, I was there to show the flag (and ended up having to give a quick presentation). The rest of the week was spent at an airline organization meeting for improving aircraft arrivals into airports. (Fascinating to me, but I won't bore you). Janice had a great time because several of the folks brought their wives. She also knew many of them from her trips to Hawaii and our latest trip to Scotland and France. She hung around with a bunch of the "girls" and had a great time. She also found a Bible Study Fellowship meeting, figured out where it was, and rode the tram there.

Melbourne has a tremendous public transportation system on their electric trams. You can by a week pass for \$19A and go anywhere. Janice has used this system a lot. They have built the city around it (kinda sorta) and the only interesting thing it does to the traffic is force what they call a "hook right turn". Remember that they drive on the left hand side of the road. The trams go down the center. If you want to turn right (across traffic) on a tram street, you have to line up to the far far left (almost on the cross walk). After your light turns red, everyone waits patiently for those folks to make their right turn. Sounds weird, works great...no horns or nasty gestures.

We didn't get to do a lot during the week of the airline meetings as there were events on most evenings. Although, one night several airline guys convinced us to go to the big casino for the buffet dinner. Well, the buffet dinner wasn't that great, but the "pokies" were. That's their slot machines. It is the largest casino in the south hemisphere. Probably a piker in comparison to Las Vegas, but big for here. We had a good time and didn't really spend that much money.

Another night Janice and I went (via tram) to St. Kilda Beach. It is an area much like Capital Hill...very eclectic, organic, arty and all of that stuff. I convinced her to go eat in a Goanese restaurant, even though she didn't know where Goa was. (Note: for those of you who want to know, it is a ex-Portuguese colony off of India. She had a nice mild meal and I had Chicken Vindaloo (fire). It was great.

We also took a walk on Friday and went through the Kings Domain Park. They were getting ready for the Moomba festival (which included the Australian Grand Prix) and were having ski jump competitions on the Yarra river. After the water skiing, they had an extreme snow/ski board demonstration with lots of flips. This was also a place where all of the crew clubs were and so there was some heavy duty crew training going on. We made it back to our hotel after dark and found that the park near our hotel was populated with "possums"...they were marsupials, but not the rat-tailed, ugly possums we are used to. Janice fell in love with them and had to talk to each one.

Because of the Grand Prix, we got kicked out of the hotel. So we moved out to the airport. We weren't much interested in the Grand Prix anyway. I rented a car and on Saturday, we took off down the Great Ocean Road (South west) to see the 12 Apostles. These are 12 large formations (over 500 ft) which have separated from the coastal cliffs. It was a very interesting drive (remember that they drive on the left). Janice had to sit in the back seat (I had another colleague in the front). She might tell it different; but I say results count....we are still alive. The road to the Apostles was like Highway 1 in California...lots of hairpin turns. We decided to take an interior road back and kinda sorta got misplaced. Actually, we missed a turn, noted the map, and took a road which looked much more promising on the map than it did in real life. We ended up on 15 Kms of roads in the back forests which became gravel, and progressively more narrow. This became even more of a concern when we saw a sign which stated that logging trucks were using that road. Because it was so windy, it took us forever and we despaired of making it out alive. Finally, we started to see some oncoming traffic and were greatly heartened when we saw a jogger. We finally made it out. What an experience.

The next day we took off for Healesville. They had a wild animal park that we thought might be nice. The park itself wasn't that great, but we did enjoy the area. We again took the long way home, but didn't get misplaced this time. (Note: I hesitate to say lost. One of my friends who was a navigator in the airforce told me once that you might not know where you are, but you are NOT lost unless someone is looking for you1)

We moved back into the city on Monday and stayed at the Hyatt on Collins. It is a great hotel and was very convenient. I know everyone is breathlessly excited to understand how business went with our Australian company....but I'll leave you in suspense. The CEO of the company invited us over to his house for a "barbie" and we all had a great time. He and his wife are from Tasmania. He said EVERYONE in Tasmania was either a convict or a guard. He said that if you looked three generations back in their family; his relatives were convicts and her relatives were guards.

We had the rest of the evenings free and have been tramming around the city and having a great time. The weather has been outstanding. Tonight is our last night. It is probably 70 degrees out there. We took a boat trip up the Yarra River and went to an historic port town (Williamstown). It was a great time, but it was about 31 degrees and so it was quite hot.

Well, I'm going to close. We have to pack to get ready to leave in the am. Janice told me that I will NEVER get to go to Melbourne alone again. She has had a great time. The people are great. The city is convenient and beautiful and the weather was wonderful. We both will have a lot of fond memories of this place.