

## Australia: a Two-Week Taste of the World Down Under

By Jill Perlin, Simply Smart Travel Correspondent

Australia is a land of many cities, cultures and climates. Since it's so far away, and it takes a long time to get there, it's best to plan at least two weeks. Here's a sample itinerary, in which you can visit two large cities – Sydney and Melbourne – and two other popular sites – the Outback and the Great Barrier Reef. It's important to remember one thing – Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere. So, their seasons are opposite those of the U.S.



You can begin in Melbourne. To get a sense of the city, head to the Melbourne Skydeck. You'll ascend 88 floors in less than 40 seconds. Once you enter the Skydeck, take in 360-degree views of Melbourne through floor-to-ceiling windows. If you are a tennis fan, and visit Melbourne in January, you can take in the Australian Open.

Outside of Melbourne is Phillip Island Nature Park, which has the largest Little Penguin colony in the world. You can watch the penguins waddle home from the ocean at night. No trip to Australia would be complete without seeing a koala. You can do that at the Koala Conservation Reserve, which is approximately 20 minutes from the Park. There is also the Great Ocean Road. This 150-mile stretch of road is known for its scenic views, as well as surfing, wildlife, and hiking and biking trails. Start early in the day, in order to avoid large crowds.

The koala is arguably the most adorable animal on the planet.

From Melbourne, fly to Alice Springs, where you'll learn about the heart of the Outback culture and ultra-remote living. Start at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. Established in 1871, it was built to aid in communications within and outside of Australia. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is one of the largest and most comprehensive health care services in the world and focuses on residents living in small rural areas. Lastly, the School of the Air is a one-of-a-kind school for children here, where a teacher can be a day's drive away.

From Alice Springs, head to Ayers Rock, which is a 4 ½-hour drive. Also known as Uluru, Ayers Rock is actually a massive sandstone monolith in the heart of the Northern Territory's arid "Red Centre". Uluru is sacred to indigenous Australians and is thought to have started forming around 550 million years ago. Take a sunrise walk around the 7.5-mile base trail, and stare in amazement at its incredible size. At night, take a stargazing tour and learn about the southern night sky. Lastly, do a camel ride and learn how camels were introduced into Australia in the 1840s.

Next, fly from Ayers Rock to Cairns, the gateway for the Great Barrier Reef. It provides some of the best snorkeling and scuba diving in the world. There are many local companies that offer ½-day and full-day excursions. Even if you are a novice, you'll be wowed by the clear water, colorful fish and abundance of coral. Outside of the city, head to Kuranda. Take the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway up to the top and

observe wildlife, experience the rain forest and hike one of the many trails. Ride the scenic railway back down.

The final stop is Sydney. You can fly direct from Cairns. There is so much to see in this vibrant city. Take a backstage tour of the Sydney Opera House. Beyond observing the Sydney Harbor Bridge, climb it! It's one of this author's all-time favorite travel experiences. Visit Bondi or Manley Beach, which are accessible by public ferry. About two hours outside of the city, through a very scenic ride, are the Blue Mountains. One highlight is the famous Three Sisters, an unusual rock formation in the Mountains, Legend has it three sisters fell in love with three men, but were forbidden to marry.



You can walk across the Sydney Harbor Bridge...or climb to the top

Throughout Australia, there is a wide variety of great food and drink. Seafood is always fresh and plentiful. Australia also has several wine regions worth visiting. Lastly, Australia is well known for its zoos – Toronga and Australia Zoo, in particular. If you're a fan of the late Steve Irwin and his family, Australia Zoo will be familiar to you.

There is no shortage of things to do in Australia. There are many local tour companies that can help you get from place to place, and with individual excursions. So, you can choose to see the sites on your own, or have someone else do the planning. Either way, you'll find that Australia's people, attractions, cuisine and history make it a wonderful destination. It's worth the long flight and jet lag! And, you'll surely want to return.



Uluru is an awesome site at any time of the day



The Sydney Opera House is one of the most iconic sites in the world.

### Getting Around There:

- By air – There are direct flights to Melbourne and Sydney from the West Coast of the U.S. Within Australia, you can generally fly to and from major cities.
- By train – Australia has a large network of rail service within and outside of the large metropolitan areas.

- By cruise – Several cruise lines offer sailings to Australia. Some longer sailings also include New Zealand.

**Must-Sees and Dos For A Short Trip of a Week or Less:** (as many as you like)

- In Sydney:
  - Take a backstage tour of the Sydney Opera House
  - Visit the Sydney Harbor Bridge (if adventurous, do the Bridge Climb)
  - Go out to the Blue Mountains
- In Cairns:
  - Snorkel or dive Great Barrier Reef
  - Pay a visit to Kuranda.

**If You Have At Least Ten Days, Some of Your Best Options Are:** (as many as you like)

In addition to the above:

- In Sydney:
  - Take the public ferry to Bondi or Manley Beach.
  - Use public transportation to visit the Taronga Zoo.
- In Melbourne:
  - Use a local tour operator to visit Phillip Island.
  - Rent a car and drive the Great Ocean Road.
  - Visit some local wineries.
- In the Outback
  - Visit Ayers Rock/Uluru.

**Sidebar: This Destination At A Glance**

**Over 50 Advantage:** It can be expensive to do everything in Australia you might want to do. It also takes more time. It's a vast country and there's a lot to see.

**Mobility Level:** Generally low to moderate. The Sydney Harbor Bridge Climb requires a higher level of mobility.

**When To Go:** Check

out: <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/best-time-to-visit-australia> **Where To Stay:**

- Sydney – Sydney Harbor Marriott
- Ayers Rock – Sails in the Desert
- Cairns – Hilton Cairns

**Special Travel Interests:**

- Aboriginal history and culture
- Unique natural wonders

*Jill Perlin is an avid and intrepid traveler. She and her husband, Jordan, have been to almost every state in the U.S. and over 40 countries around the world. She enjoys everything about travel – getting to the destination, meeting the locals learning new cultures, and seeking out places to eat and drink off the beaten path. All photos by Jill and Jordan Perlin.*