

## Virtuoso Ghan Trip June 09

What can we say about this wonderful post Virtuoso Educational Trip? GREAT, Fabulous, just plain wonderful!!!!

We left Melbourne the morning after the Gala and flew to Alice Springs and then on to Darwin in the Northern Territory. Qantas as usual was the best way to go and the flight was smooth with great scenery as we approached Alice.



When we arrived in Darwin we were met by our transfer and tour driver for the day and were surprised to find the weather in the high 90 degrees F. After some discussion as to what we wanted to see and do, he drove us to the World War II Memorial Museum where we saw a short film about the invasions in Darwin during this momentous war. There was memorabilia of all

kinds— weapons, bunkers and other artifacts left over from this time in history.



Upon leaving the museum we were shown the area and warned about the



crocodile attacks which happen every year near the salt water ponds and sea. It certainly didn't sound safe to swim in any of this water! If you have seen the film "Australia, the Movie" you will remember the dock where the cattle was loaded on the ship. Well we were privileged to see what was left of the pier and wharf after the filming. You could almost hear the shouts and noise as those "cheeky bulls" loaded the ship. It is a beautiful location where the

day cruisers load and unload their passengers from dinner cruises.

That night saw us guests of the Northern Territory Tourism Commission at Mindil Market. This was a lively place with 250 food, music and craft vendors. We had plenty of time to purchase items for friends and co workers back home. There were some who got really brave and had their palms read and learned some new things about themselves and their lives.



The next morning we joined a group of approximately 30 people from various hotels throughout Darwin on an APT tour bus headed for Florence and surrounds for a day of sightseeing. We had a stop at a beautiful park where Craig, our driver/guide showed us barra-mundi and tried to feed them, but the long necked turtles proved just a bit too fast and they got to eat most of the

food. Sarah, a fellow traveler and I took turns trying to take pictures of a BLUE dragon fly which was relaxing by the bus.



After a short stop to have something cold to drink we were introduced to the Havlik Park and it's primary residence a castle in the outback. It is not every day that someone will take their



time and effort to build a replica of a castle from their home land, but there it was in the middle of nowhere complete with moat and draw bridge.



Our next stop was Florence for a dip in the pool and a hike through the forest. It was so refreshing and obviously a popular stop as we saw vehicles of all types from cars to campers arriving and leaving. Craig told us about the flora and fauna which inhabited this area. We continued on to Wangi Falls and saw beautiful rainbow birds in flight and again waterfalls which would rival the ones in Hawaii.



We must not forget the wonderful insects which inhabit this part of the country, they must get their time in my blog. There are various types of termites which build all different types of homes in this searing heat. They also eat different things. The Cathedral termites burry deep in the ground but their homes extend many feet in the air also. And then there are the grass termites which build their homes in structures which resemble grave stones, so we visited the termite “cemetery” . It was very strange looking at these “headstones” and know that they are homes of termites. It was a tiring adventure which put some of us to sleep before we returned to Darwin for supper at a pub, compliments of Travel2 and our great leader Janie Hall (a delight to meet and spend time with).



We were finally ready for our Ghan adventure. Okay you say Ghan I say Ghan. Who is right we don't really know—I think it is like tomato and tomato. You know what I mean? Anyway we arrived at the station to find that we could only take an overnight bag with us which weighed 20kg. The rest of our stuff would travel in the luggage compartment and meet us in Alice Springs. We were shown to 4 cars which would take care of our group.



We had the vintage cars of the Chairman's car where we had our briefings by our host Renee Goode from Rail Australia and Michael our “purser” on the train.



The car where I stayed was the Vintage Car the Prince of Wales with it's antique sink and beautiful lounge section. The cabin was comfortable and appointed with carvings and decorations which would not happen in our present economy or age. The next car held the deluxe gold cabins and had a large directors table and chairs where we played “would you rather” after dinner. Our meals were held in the Queen Adelaide Restaurant. They were scrumptious and the wait staff was very enjoyable and fun to be around. Our group of course was quiet and reserved for the meals which were





We enjoyed a stop at Katherine with a cruise on the river and look at the ancient aboriginal drawings which were left long long ago. We saw evidence of a female croc who was checking out the proper placement of her eggs practicing digging techniques and places where her eggs would be safest from predators. It was such a comfortably warm day not too hot or cold for this trip into the gorge with all of the rock formations an experience to be remembered.



that made it

After drinks in the lounge car and meeting new people, we again had a fabulous dinner in the restaurant car. Then after a round of “would you rather” I headed for my comfortable bunk. The train finds a siding and pulls off around midnight and sits there for 6 hours so there is no rocking or clicking during the midnight hours and you can get a great rest.



The next morning dawned bright and clear and after a hearty breakfast we pulled into the train station at Alice Springs and an end to our trip on the Ghan. We did have an opportunity to thank our hosts David Armour of Southern World and Renee Goode of Rail Australia and give them our impression of this portion of the trip.



Janie Hall continued on with us to Melbourne where we were the guests of the Intercontinental Melbourne. This hotel has been newly renovated in a total reform which took 1 1/2 years to complete. It was formerly the La’Meridian and is a beautiful vintage building which represents the combination of 2 woolen mills. The rooms are very modern and face in on the courtyard or out onto the street. It is extremely comfortable and with it’s location on Collins Street easily accessible to shopping and all of Melbourne’s attractions.

I was able to stay there 2 extra days after the group left. During that time I visited South Bank for lunch and the Crown Towers Casino to check out a real Australian casino. I also spent a morning at the Melbourne aquarium. It features an Antarctic exhibit which was entertaining and informative. A unique feature of the aquarium is a glass bottom boat ride, which takes you behind the scenes into the food preparation area and in a boat over the fish tank where you are introduced to the huge 6 foot manta ray and shark which inhabit this area.



This adventure was great and I would highly recommend the Ghan and the Northern Territory. Take time to meet the current residents and get to know what these areas are like.