



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### Sydney to Brisbane Roadtrip

by Amaru & Suzanne, November 4th 2006

Since Queensland doesn't use daylight savings time, people from New South Wales (and Victoria as well) say that when you cross the border you have to turn your clock back 1 hour + 10 years. People there are supposedly crazy. This has been one of the reasons that I've wanted to see Queensland for quite a while now. And on this trip we made it happen!

Our plan was to drive along the coast road all the way up to Brisbane and on our way back home we would drive inland. That way I would get to see as much as possible during our trip. Since this is such a long drive (Brisbane is around 1000km north of Sydney) we borrowed Suz's mothers car. It's a bit bigger than ours, is an automatic and the most important feature.....it has cruise control.

We started out from Sydney early on the Saturday morning, the weather was dark, cloudy and rainy. Well, at least we didn't have to worry about having the sun in our eyes. We drove for a couple of hours until we hit Port Macquarie where we decided to stop for lunch.

Port Macquarie is a small coastal town, it looked really cute and had a great beach.....unfortunately, it was still raining so we just went for a quick walk, picked up something to eat, had the meal in the car overlooking the beach and then continued on our way.



**Lots of Kangaroos**  
Just outside of Port Macquarie



**On my way to the dive site**  
at South West Rocks

Driving out of Port Macquarie, on a field just next to the golf course, we saw lots and lots of Kangaroos just grazing away. Considering the fact that I'd only seen one before, and only very quickly before he took off, I found this to be very exciting!

I had to pull the car over and have a quick look at them, I saw a small side road that didn't have any cars on it at all so we drove in there and watched the 'roos. We even got to see two or three of them fighting. Most of them though watched us and when they saw that we were just sitting in the car, went back to their grazing.

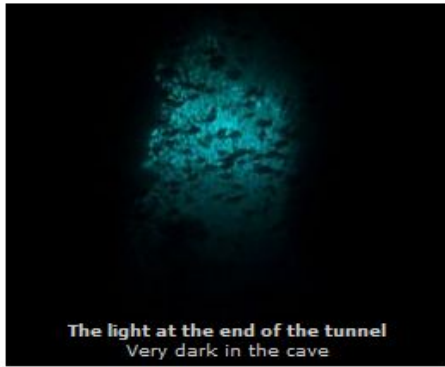
Back in the car we continued driving north and eventually ended up in a small coastal town by the name of South West Rocks.

When we were planning our roadtrip we thought of possible places to stop along the way. I also wanted to do a dive somewhere on the trip. After some reading and searching on the Internet we decided to stop at South West Rocks for our first night. It's pretty much right in the middle between Sydney and Brisbane, and it has one of Australia's best cave dives.

That night after checking in to the accommodation at the dive shop (bunk style, but lots better than a hostel) we went to the local pub to get some dinner and a drink. We had just ordered our first drinks when a guy that we saw at the dive shop comes up to us and tells us to join him. So we spent the rest of the evening sitting together with a group of 8-10 people, all divers, and all of them had already done the cave dive that day so I got quite a lot of feedback about the dive we were going on the next morning.



**Is the water a little choppy?**  
You think?!?



**The light at the end of the tunnel**  
Very dark in the cave

After an early start the next morning (well, at least for me, Suz got to sleep in since she wasn't going diving), I suited up, we drove to the harbour and then went on the boat for around 20-25 min until we reached the dive site.

We were diving at a cave, my first real cave dive so after some quick instructions on what to do (watch your head, don't bang your tank etc. etc.) we jumped in the water, discovered that it was quite cold (it was between 17-18C degrees) and headed down to 25m until we found the entrance to the cave.

The cave was awesome, it was 125m in length and pitch black. We saw a few small fishes and quite a few big langostines inside the cave. In the beginning the cave was quite small so you had to watch where you went, but after a while it opened up. We even found an airpocket inside the cave. My dive buddy Dan and I entered the airpocket and there we could talk to each other and breathe the air. But since we didn't know how fresh the air actually was we just did this for about 10sec and then returned to the dive.

After swimming in the cave for a while we were able to see the end....there was a small opening that got bigger and bigger the closer we got to it. And it was filled with small fishes. By the entrance of the cave we also saw a Grey Nurse Shark, these sharks are quite big and look dangerous but they are mostly harmless.

We did two dives at the same spot and they were both great, the only downside was that it had been raining all day before, the sky was quite grey and the rain soon picked up again, so the visibility in the water wasn't the best. I'll just have to come back here later and hopefully get better weather.

After getting back to the dive shop, cleaning the equipment and having a hot shower, we got back in the car and continued north.



**The end of the cave**  
Filled with fish



**Lots and lots of these little buggers**  
Could barely see anything else

Driving for a little while we saw an ad for "The Pub with no Beer" and decided that this was odd enough to get off the main road and explore it. To get there we had to drive along very crooked roads for around 30min, the view of the rolling hills was very beautiful and worth the side trip just by itself. When we reached the pub we discovered that it had it's own brewery... so it actually had beers. The name just comes from an old Australian Country song about this pub - Gordon Parsons, country music singer wrote the song about the characters who frequented the old pub, and the beer that would often run out before the next quota arrived.

At Coffs Harbour we stopped and tried to find a place where we could have a late lunch. Since we were there on a Sunday afternoon though, not much was open. After walking for a while we just sat down at a coffee shop and had a small snack each.

Driving out of Coffs Harbour we made a quick stop at the "Big Banana", the original "Big" item in Australia. On several locations around the country you will see different "Big" things. They are very tacky and I can't really understand the point of them. But, since we were driving past it, why not just stop for 2min and snap a photo of it.

A few hours later just before reaching our destination for that day we drove past the "Giant Prawn" in Ballina, like I said... they like their tacky big things...

Not long after this we reached Byron Bay, our final destination for that day. After checking in and dropping our bags in our room, we went in search of dinner. We walked around the area for a while, and just decided to take a pizza back to the hotel with some red wine that we had brought along.



**Shark!**  
A Wobbegong Shark



**Another Shark!!**  
This time it's a Grey Nurse Shark

The next morning we decided to do something really crazy...got up at 5am, got dressed and then drove up to the light house in Byron Bay, this is the most easterly point on the Australian mainland. Here we were the first people to experience the sunrise in Australia! It's not often we get up this early (unless we have to catch an early flight), and we've never done it to watch a sunrise before. But it was worth it!

When we got back to the hotel we decided that since everything was closed at that time anyway we might as well sleep another two hours or so....so we did!

We spent a little while exploring Byron Bay to see what the appeal of the place is, every traveller says that you have to see it....well, I couldn't see what was so special about it. Sure, it has a beautiful beach,

but it still looks and feels the same as Bondi Beach in Sydney, which I don't care much for either.... It's way too exploited, the place is full of hostels, tacky cafes and filled with shops selling all sorts of crap!

We didn't waste more time than we had to and continued heading north until we reached Tweed Heads and Coolangatta where we had a great view over the Gold Coast....Australia's Florida. Here I also got to stand with one foot in each state at the border... tacky...yes of course, but still fun!

We were now very close to our final destination, we drove past the Gold Coast (we would do that one the way home) and continued on towards Brisbane. Here we managed to find our way around the city and found ourselves in front of my friend Geoff's house.

Geoff is a guy that I got to know when I lived in Dublin, he was sharing a house with one of my colleagues from work. I'd been meaning to visit on a few occasions but never gotten around to it before. He lives in a beautiful old Queenslander house and this is where we stayed during our visit in Brisbane.



**A small Cuttlefish**  
Sitting all by himself

That day Geoff took us up to Mt Coot-tha where we had a great view over the city. From here we continued on towards the next mountain surrounding Brisbane, Mt Nebo. We even found a vineyard here and sampled some of their products before heading back to the city.

That night Geoff cooked for us, we had Kangaroo steaks, chips and Caesar salad....and we washed it all down with some great German beers which we had acquired earlier on. The steaks were awesome....but then 'roo steak usually is. We ended that night with a few shots of Absinth that Geoff had brought with him from the Czech Republic. I've had it before, but damn that's a strong shot, 70% alcohol burns nicely....



**The pub with no beer**  
...had its own brewery!

The next morning, Tuesday morning, we got an early start, Geoff made us breakfast....which contained Kangaroo sausages...it's all about the Kangaroo's and then we got on the road again heading north towards Australia Zoo.

Australia Zoo is, or was, the Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwins Zoo. It's only been a few weeks since he passed away in a diving accident and the zoo contains a large memorial to him, it's a long wall of tributes. It was a bit sad walking along reading all the messages that people left.

We caught a Crocodile show at the Crocoseum, where Steve Irwin used to give performances himself. It was very interesting and quite funny as well to watch the show.

After that we walked around the park for a few hours exploring it all, seeing different animals and reptiles....and the best part was that we got to feed and pat the Kangaroos. We even found a Kangaroo that had a little baby, a Joey, in her pouch. I tried for quite a while to get a shot of him, but he was so shy that he only stuck his head out on one occasion.



**Very picturesque...**  
isn't it!



**The Big Banana at Coffs Harbour**  
Tackorama galore!

When we felt that we had done it all.....after a few good hours, we left the park and continued east towards Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast.

Here Suz and I sat on the beach while Geoff was in the water body surfing. Since we wanted to skip rush hour traffic going back to Brisbane we just decided to find somewhere in Caloundra to have dinner.....and it worked out perfectly. For around 10 bucks each we got a two course meal dinner (Suz and Geoff at least....I managed to get a three course meal).

Back in Brisbane that evening we walked along Southbank where I was able to snap some great night photos of the city.

On our last day in Brisbane we caught the CityCat (a ferry that runs along the Brisbane river) into the city. There Geoff gave us the tour of the city, showing us among other things the University, Parliament, Casino and the main shopping street.

Back at Geoff's home we said our goodbyes and headed south towards the Gold Coast. The weather was getting bad again, it was grey and wet once more, but by this stage we were getting quite used to it.

It takes around an hour to drive from Brisbane to Surfers Paradise, our next destination, and just before we got off the highway the rain really started pouring down on us, it was coming down so heavily that even though we were on a 100km/h highway, we couldn't drive faster than 60-70km/h.

The downpour only lasted for a few minutes, but when we got off the highway we noticed that it had caused some damage. All the traffic lights on the road to Surfers were out and of course, traffic was really slow. I took us a good hour to drive the final distance, usually you do this in 10min.



**More tackiness**  
The Giant Prawn of Ballina



**Sunrise**  
at Byron Bay

We reached Surfers, found our hotel and checked in....and this is where we stayed for the next two days. The weather was wet and cold so there was no point really in venturing too far from our hotel.

On our last evening we met up with a Swedish friend of mine, Beatrice, who's living in that area at the moment. This is another friend from Dublin. We've met up before in Sydney but she moved up here a few weeks ago and it was fun to catch up again over a few drinks.

The day we left Surfers Paradise the sun came out....figures! Before we started our drive south we walked down to the beach just to have a quick look at what it actually looks like in sunshine.

One of our first stops on our way home was Nimbin....a real hippie village. The village is very small, but still most people in Australia know of it. And the reason why, well....let's just put it this way, they have a Hemp Embassy there! We walked down the street and we could see and smell Marijuana everywhere!! Quite different to anything else I must say, and the funniest thing....there is a police station just down the street.

We spent our last night on the road in Armidale, a town located at an altitude of 1000m, so it was quite chilly during the night. We started our last day early, knocked off Tamworth, Country Capital of Australia, where we got to see the last of our big things....the big Golden Guitar!

A few hours later we were back home, we were both tired after being on the road for a week, but still very pleased with our trip.....even though the weather could have been so much better. Well, can't get it all now can we.....



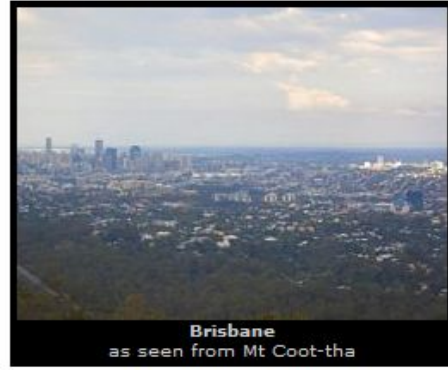
**Byron Bay**  
Light House



**A beautiful sand castle**  
at Byron Bay beach



**In between the border of  
New South Wales and Queensland**



**Brisbane  
as seen from Mt Coot-tha**



**Geoff pointing out  
different locations in Brisbane**



**A Kookaburra  
watching over the vineyard**



**Suz at the Brisbane Vineyard  
Located on Mt Nebo**



**Absinth and sugar...  
make sure to burn that alcohol**



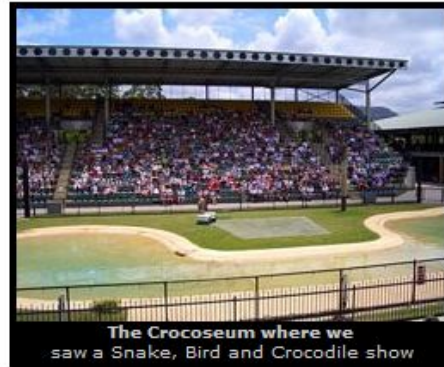
**Cheers!!  
Absinth shots....scary stuff**



**Australia Zoo  
The late Steve Irwin's Zoo**



**Alligator**  
...don't wanna be wrestling that one



**The Crocoseum where we**  
saw a Snake, Bird and Crocodile show



**Nice Croc!**  
He wants to keep a little distance to it



**Jumping Crocodile**  
Showing us how they can jump



**A Green Python**  
Non venomous, but very beautiful



**Crikey!**  
I'm jumping with Steve



**Geoff and I**  
fight to keep the Croc down



**Little Joey sticking his head out**  
while his mother is having dinner



**Feeding time**  
It was awesome to feed the Roos



**Suz and Geoff**  
feed them as well!



**A tribute wall**  
in honour of Steve Irwin



**The largest bird in Australia**  
A Cassewarry



**The sun setting over**  
Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast



**Brisbane**  
by night!



**Geoff's house where we stayed**  
an old traditional Queensland house



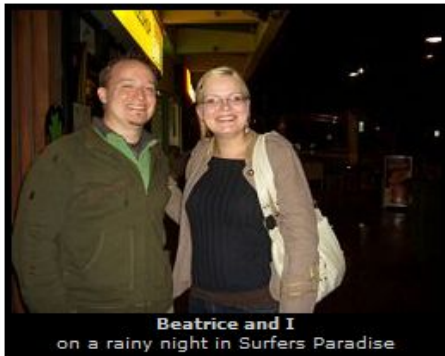
**Suz and Geoff**  
at Southbank



**Suz and I**  
in front of the Parliament House



**The Brisbane Casino**  
Not as glamorous as when seen at night



**Beatrice and I**  
on a rainy night in Surfers Paradise



**The view from**  
our hotel room



**Main strip**  
in Surfers Paradise



**On our way to the beach**  
...and yes, at Surfers Paradise



**That's the beach**  
not that many people on it though



**"Let it Grow"**  
The Hemp Embassy at Nimbin



**Nimbin Hemp Embassy**  
Open time: "Whenever"



**Even more tackiness...**  
The Big Golden Guitar at Tamworth

[Back to Top](#)