

The City of Sydney

As we sailed into the centre of Sydney on a gloriously sunny afternoon, we were greeted by a skyline of impressive buildings. A curious mixture of ultra modern designs sitting alongside well preserved and still functional traditional sandstone buildings.

Sydney is a really beautiful and vibrant city, a place you could lose yourself in for a good three week holiday. OK, the traffic reminded us of London or Liverpool, but guess what - they have an overhead monorail system, similar to the DART in Dublin, where trains run every 5 minutes, and we glided along above the gridlocked traffic below! Our all day tickets cost around £3.50, so excellent value and service combined.



Sydney's monorail



With food in mind?

After clearing Aussie customs, we headed off on foot to the city centre, first to buy \$AUS, and then on to the magnificent tower and its magnificent views from a height of 330 metres. As it approached feeding time we jumped on the monorail and headed off to Sydney's own Chinatown area - the ideal place for our evening meal! We were not disappointed, a meal in the open air which left us very full, and for around £6 each.

We continued the evening at a busy little bay called Cockle Bay in the harbour, with many bars and restaurants with open air lounges, and frequented by many families with their kids and pets - a nice safe and friendly atmosphere.

This was a unique night in Sydney, as it was an occasion when two famous ships were in port at the same time. The Queen Mary 2, and also the Queen Elizabeth 2 were both visiting with their respective cruise

passengers. The last time these fine and mighty vessels were in this port at the same time was during troop carrying duties during World War 2, and to mark the occasion a grand firework display was staged by the authorities. Our smaller Van Gogh certainly rubbed shoulders with the upper echelons on this night!

Our overnight stay here allowed us to have a full day to explore the city - by morning we took a tour bus which took us to see the Sydney Opera House, both outside and inside. OK, we have all seen the pictures of the outside, and the inside is equally impressive and wonderful. Our visit allowed us to enter the opera house itself, where rehearsals were underway by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.



View of Opera House & Harbour Bridge, Sydney, Australia



Interior of Opera House

Our city tour took us to the many quarters of the city, through immaculately maintained colonial type houses, schools, sports grounds, parks, shopping areas, Kings Cross (!), and on to that world renowned Bondi Beach, which really is as good as it sounds!



Bondi Beach



Inside a submarine!

After the tour finished, we lunched al fresco in a harbour restaurant, before setting off to visit the Maritime Museum, and then the Sydney Aquarium.

The sun was hot as we first went inside a submarine, and marvelled at how 68 men could live in such cramped quarters, alongside lines of torpedoes, and other masses of equipment too. Next visit was to a naval warship alongside, now as a preserved exhibit, but with all its gear, armaments and equipment still intact. What high tech vessels these both were!

Sydney Aquarium is a huge place, with countless tanks housing all manner of creatures, and in glorious natural colour too. A realistic coral reef, complete with indigenous corals and Australian fish. Two other large tanks held sharks up to around 10 feet long, turtles, and fur seals, all of which could be viewed from above and below water level, so watch out for some interesting photos!

As the Van Gogh sailed out of Sydney early that evening, we headed back to the harbour, not to be left behind! Isn't it amazing just how much activity you can put into a day and a half in port - but this is the magical mixture of the cruise, lazy days whilst travelling on the high seas, and hectic exploring whilst visiting places around the world!