

OUR HOLIDAY IN CAIRNS

We slept late this morning and the ship has already docked when we surface for breakfast. It must have been something to do with the fantastic send-off we had from our computer class members last night!

We take a taxi northwards to Trinity Beach, it takes about half an hour to get there, and when we arrive it is past noon. The one bedroom apartment that we had already booked on the internet is very nice. It has a large lounge with sofa, armchairs, coffee tables, dining table, dining chairs, TV, DVD player and CD player. The kitchen is well equipped with a fridge freezer, stove, microwave, washing machine and tumble drier.



What is really special though, is the view from the balcony. We are on the second floor, and can see the swimming pool, tropical gardens and the beach and Coral Sea. There are palm trees overhead, and a magnificent bright orange flame tree is flowering next to our balcony. Bougainvillea climbs over the covered BBQ area, and Frangipani flowers perfume the air.

Opposite the hotel is a public garden area where tables and benches are laid out underneath wooden gazebos. Free gas barbecues are provided for the public to use, and we wonder how long such facilities would last back home in the UK.

Our first two full days are spent here, simply relaxing. We cannot use the beach, as it is closed due to the heavy swell left after Cyclone Guba threatened

Northern Queensland. In fact, this Cyclone was the same one that we sailed around in the Van Gogh, and the same one that devastated Papua New Guinea last week.

Two days after leaving the ship, we receive an e-mail from our boss in Travelscope head office in the UK. He now says that because our computer classes were so well attended, he now wants to offer us the whole of the second cruise from January to April 2008. He also asks us if we would be prepared to join the ship later on in its present cruise.

We quickly work out that we can fly out to Fiji, instead of flying home to Manchester, and tomorrow we will travel into Cairns city centre to try to arrange flights. We will also need to cancel our flights already booked back to the UK. We feel pleased to be returning to the ship and meeting up with our friends once more.

The day of Owain's birthday we choose to spend travelling on a 1 ½ hour journey on a 100 year old train deep into the rainforest above Cairns. The journey is spectacular, with many bends, bridges and tunnels carved into the rocks. We pass waterfalls so near to the train that we can feel the water vapour coming through the open windows.



The village of Kuranda, at the end of the rail journey, is a disappointment - full of souvenir shops all selling the same things. However, we do spend some time in the bird park there, where we see many colourful native birds, and a fascinating butterfly sanctuary, where huge electric blue, orange and metallic green butterflies flutter amongst the tropical foliage.



Our trip back to Cairns is made on a 7.5km cable car journey, called "Sky Rail", which travels, via 2 intermediate stations, just metres above the rainforest canopy. We leave the cable car at the 2 mid stations in order to view some large waterfalls and ravines, and to see the trees of the rainforest up close. The final descent by Sky Rail is awe-inspiring and we can see the islands out to sea which are part of the Great Barrier Reef. Look out for the photos!



Today, the 24th November, we are spending catching up with e-mails etc, and, in the afternoon, relaxing on the beach where we swim in the warm sea. The notice board by the lifeguard station gives the water temperature as 29degrees C. There is a "stinger net" in the sea opposite the hotel, which is designed to keep out the infamous Box jellyfish, salt water Crocodiles and Sharks.

On Sunday, we take a trip to the Great Barrier Reef, this is our last full day in Australia, and we are looking forward to seeing this natural wonder. Our coach picks us up at 7.40am and whisks us in air-conditioned comfort to the jetty in Cairns where the "Ocean Spirit" catamaran awaits us. There are numerous Reef tours on offer, and we have chosen a tour especially for novice snorkellers.

Almost 2 hours later we arrive at Michaelmas Cay, a small sand bar and part of the Great Barrier Reef, which is an important sea bird breeding colony. A small section of the beach has been roped off for us to use, so we do not disturb the Crested Terns and Noddys that have built their nests here. A small boat is used as a tender to transfer passengers to the island, and we are all given snorkel equipment and wet suits. Alvina is glad that she has no sense of smell, as most people are horrified by the smell from the birds!



We are able to walk out to the coral and see the many colourful fish that inhabit it. There are clown fish, parrot fish, surgeon fish and much more. We see giant green lipped clams a metre across, and beautiful gardens of multicoloured coral.



After a good hour snorkelling, we are transferred back to the catamaran for a fantastic buffet lunch, after which we are taken on a semi-submarine to see even more of the Reef through its large windows. We just have time for a quick trip back to the beach for some more swimming, and then it is time to sail back to the mainland. It truly was a magical day, and one that we will remember for a very long time.

