



The Sydney skyline, including the Opera House.

Australia & New Zealand

Beautiful scenery and friendly people abound in the land Down Under, as local writer Paula G. Cullison discovers during her travels.

Photos by Paul G. Cullison

VISITING AUSTRALIA and New Zealand has been on my radar screen for quite some time.

Our month long trip was all too short.

You will fall in love with Sydney, Australia, one of the world's greatest cities with a population of roughly four and a half million.

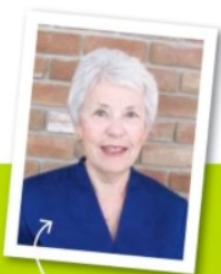
Walk across the Harbour Bridge for a lovely view of the Sydney skyline, which includes the famous Sydney Opera House, where we attended a production of Carmen. Walking along Cockle Bay wharf in Darling Harbor and Circular Quay, one notices the enormous selection of outdoor cafes and restaurants. Close by is an area called The Rocks. Originally inhabited by the first Aboriginal people (Gadigal), it became home to the convicts who worked on building the city. Walk through Hyde Park to the Queen Victoria Building, home to many upscale shops and several cafes.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales (NSW), located within the Royal Gardens, a

beautiful 74-acre park, has an extensive collection that consists of Australian, European, Asian, and aboriginal art. Not to be missed are the ferry to Manly where surfers abound; Bondi beach for a lovely coastal walk; and Watson's Bay for more beautiful scenery, where the blue sky merges with blue water.

Take a day trip to the Blue Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site near Sydney. There you will find intriguing sandstone formations, including The Three Sisters. Descend at a 52-degree angle to the base of the Jamison Valley via the world's steepest Scenic Railway in glass-roofed cars. Hike through this Jurassic period rainforest. Return to the top via the Katoomba Scenic Skyway cable car for a most memorable day of experiences.

On the return to Sydney, visit Ferndale Wildlife Park to see native animals (koala, kangaroo, wombat) and indigenous birds; and visit the Waradah Aboriginal Center in Katoomba to hear legends, songs, and music



Local Paula G. Cullison manifests her love for international travel through her writing and photography, as evidenced by her three major exhibits: *Have Passport-Will Travel: Journey through the Emerald Isle; and To Cuba with Love*. Paula's published articles, book, and photographs can be found on her website, paulacullison.com.

of the didgeridoo.

Take a trip to the Hunter Valley for wine tasting. With over 150 cellar doors from which to choose, our tour stopped at three fine boutique vineyards, one vodka distillery, and a gourmet chocolate company.

New Zealand is composed of two islands with 75 percent of the population living in the North Island.

After an enjoyable 11-night stay in Sydney, we flew to Queenstown, New Zealand, known for attracting extreme sports enthusiasts, as well as skiers and snowboarders.

Queenstown is also gateway to the beautiful Milford Sound and the areas used to film many award winners. The *Lord of the Rings* tour proved to be most interesting because the scenery is awesome. The boat cruised on the Sound at a leisurely pace, so we could enjoy the waterfalls, the mountains, Mitre Peak, the fjords and surrounding rainforest, as well as the penguins and seals.

The Queenstown Skyline Gondola ride to the top of Bob's Peak is awe inspiring. From there one can look across Lake Wakatipu to the Remarkables Mountains, Cecil Peak, and Walter Peak.

While there, take a ride on the SS Earn-



A Maori culture show in Rotorua.

slaw a coal-powered steamboat built in 1912. The trip on Lake Wakatipu includes a visit to the Walter Peak High Country Farm to observe sheep shearing and herding, as well as to enjoy a delicious gourmet lunch.

We flew from Queenstown to Auckland where we visited friends and took two interesting boat trips to Waiheke Island and Rangitoto Island.

Visit Rotorua via a tour coach bus, as it includes a boat ride through the Glowworm Caves at Waitomo, where thousands of tiny creatures light up the cave roof; it's like seeing a star-studded sky.

The impressive Mitai Maori Cultural Show in Rotorua included traditional folklore, dances, singing, canoe ceremony on the sacred spring, bush walk to see glowworms, and a dinner feast.

We enjoyed our visit to Napier, a city devastated by an earthquake in 1931 and rebuilt in the art deco style. Napier is gateway to the Hawke's Bay wine producing area. Like Australia, New Zealand prides itself on the high quality of its boutique vineyards. After a few days in Napier with walks along the beach, we returned to Auckland.

I'm ending with a popular Maori greeting, which I used several times a day on the trip: Kia Ora which means hello / be well / be healthy / all the best. It always brought a smile.