

Australia

Sydney, Byron Bay, Gold Coast, Melbourne

December 2023/January 2024

Before you Go:

Planning your Trip:

- Because we were going between Christmas and New Years, we started planning about 3-4 months out. Things definitely booked up quickly, so I am glad we did.
- We mostly stayed at Airbnbs (I'll link them all below and tell you which I recommend), and we loved it! We stayed with the hosts in shared accommodations, and it was amazing. It really enhanced our stay to get to know our hosts.
- Aussie is so safe, and the people are really generous and kind.

Getting around:

- Airlines: Vietjet and Rex are cheap airlines in Aussie. They are really easy to use, but be careful with baggage, as they are strict! They even weigh your carry-ons, and it has to be under 7 kg per person.
- Buses: Byron Bay Interchange between Byron Bay and Gold Coast (about one hour) was cheap, nice, and accommodating.
- Public Transit: Really good and really cheap in Sydney and Melbourne
- Rideshare: Uber and Didi are big there. Uber is more readily available, but Didi is cheaper.

Money/Cell-phone:

- Almost every place takes cards. When we went the exchange rate was so good, everything was 30% off.
- You need a cellphone, so make sure you can do an international plan, a physical sim card (once you arrive), or an e-sim.

Visas:

- You need to apply before you go for a [visa](#) online (there's also an app). We were approved within minutes of applying, and there is a fee of \$20 AUD. Once you do it, it is recorded on your passport, so you don't need to do anything else.

Other places to go (that we didn't)

- Cairns – Great Barrier Reef
- Whitsundays and Fraser Island
- New Zealand
- Perth – West coast of Australia
- Adelaide

Condensed Itinerary:

Day 1 – Depart **Newark** (leave on 12/24, land 2 days later with time change on 12/26)

Layover in San Francisco

Day 2 – **SFO** to **Sydney**

Arrive in **Sydney** at 6:20 AM

Accommodations: *Moxy Hotel Sydney Airport (56 Baxter Road, Mascot, NSW, Australia 2020)*

Activities: Breakfast at Chambers Fine Coffee, University of Sydney, nearby mall, Spice Alley, Sydney Harbor/Opera House, Newtown, Lunch at It's Thai Time, New Shanghai for dinner in Chatswood

Day 3 - Sydney to Byron Bay

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 103 Plantation Drive, Ewingsdale, NSW 2481, Australia*

Activities: Byron Bay Lighthouse, Pass Cafe/The Pass beach, walk around town, Hinterland Magic Glow experience

Day 4 - Byron Bay

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 103 Plantation Drive, Ewingsdale, NSW 2481, Australia*

Activities: Behind the Bay like a Local Tour (Killen Falls, Lake Ainsworth, three sisters rocks), Three Blue Ducks at The Farm

Day 5 - Byron Bay to Gold Coast

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 973 Gold Coast Hwy, Palm Beach QLD 4221, Australia*

Activities: Kayak with Dolphins, walk around ByronBus to GC, Airbnb host made us Lunch, Beach, Chinese Smorgasbord

Day 6 - Gold Coast

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 973 Gold Coast Hwy, Palm Beach QLD 4221, Australia*

Activities: Airbnb host made us breakfast, Gold Coast Farmers Market, beach, surfing, Deli by Peppe

Day 7 - Gold Coast to Melbourne

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 1 Freshwater Place, Southbank, VIC 3006, Australia*

Activities: Explore the CBD, Prahan Market, Fitzroy, Hosier Lane, Chin Chin, NYE fireworks

Day 8 - Melbourne

Accommodations: *Airbnb at 1 Freshwater Place, Southbank, VIC 3006, Australia*

Activities: Explore the CBD, Penguin Island Tour (Brighton Beach Boxes, Moonlit Sanctuary, Woolamai Beach, the Nobies, Cowes, Penguin Parade)

Day 9 - Melbourne to Sydney

Accommodations: *43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia*

Activities: State Library Victoria, Hu Tang Dumpling Bar in Chinatown, shopping, National Gallery of Victoria

Day 10 - Sydney

Accommodations: *43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia*

Activities: Breakfast at Airbnb, Taranga Zoo, Ferry/bus to Bondi Beach, Iceburgs for lunch, coastal walk, dinner/rehearsal dinner at King Dynasty

Day 11 - Sydney

Accommodations: *43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia*

Activities: Breakfast at Airbnb, walk across Sydney Harbor Bridge, shopping in Paddington, lunch at Cafe Laurtec, wedding at Bathers Pavillion, Soda Factory after party

Day 12 - Sydney

Accommodations: *43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia*

Activities: Breakfast at Airbnb, Manly beach, Greek food for lunch on the beach, Khao Pla for dinner

Day 13 - Sydney

Accommodations: 43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia

Activities: Breakfast at Airbnb, Cricket game at Allianz stadium, Paddington Artisan Market, Kiva for lunch, goodbye BBQ

Day 14 – Sydney to Seoul to JFK

Depart **Sydney** 9 AM on 1/7 and arrive at **JFK** at 8 PM on 1/7

Seoul Airport has a transfer lounge where you can pay \$6 to take a shower, hang out, and get a massage (\$50 for 30 minutes)

- If you have a long, morning layover in **Seoul**, you can do a free tour of the city. Google the airport + excursions.
- Security takes a long time (about an hour) during the layover.

City Descriptions

Sydney

- Duration of stay: 5 days
- Temperature: 70s/80s
- Where to stay: There are so many neighborhoods in Sydney! I'd recommend staying in either Darling Harbor or Bondi. We stayed at an airport hotel one night and in Chatswood at an Airbnb the other nights (because we were there for a wedding)
 - **Accommodations**: Moxxy Hotel Sydney Airport (56 Baxter Road, Mascot, NSW, Australia 2020) Confirmation Number 96177933
 - **Accommodations**: 43 Stafford Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064, Australia
 - We were with a large party for a wedding, so this was a great place to stay. It was in the suburbs, though. I wouldn't go out of your way to stay here unless you need to be in Chatswood/want to be in the suburbs/need a large home. It was about a 15 minute walk to the train/the mall/Aldi, and it had 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, and a pool.
- Things to do:
 - Sydney Harbor/Opera House - The iconic Opera House and Harbor. It's a must!
 - If there is an opera, you can see a show there, otherwise, if you want to go in, you can book a tour of the Opera House.
 - Sydney Harbor Bridge – Walk across it, you can also scale it with a tour group.
 - Paddington – great area for shopping.
 - They have a great artisan market on Saturdays.
 - By Charlotte had cute jewelry, and there were good stores nearby.
 - The stores are a bit pricey, other than the market.
 - Taronga Zoo – The famous Zoo in Sydney. It has a lot of different animals from all over the world, and is a bit further out. Definitely worth a visit, and if you can, book a Koala encounter in advance, so you can pet the Koalas. Additionally, the seal show is really fun!
 - Sydney Zoo – Smaller zoo closer to central Sydney

- Bondi Beach – The iconic beach with the pool. Touristy and crowded but BEAUTIFUL. It is a must. Do the Bondi to Coogee walk.
 - You can pay \$10 AUD to go in the pool
- Manly Beach – Another iconic beach that is a bit less crowded. Lots of great stores and restaurants in this area, too.
- University of Sydney - beautiful campus. It looks like Hogwarts. It's in Sydney Central, and it is definitely worth checking out. There's a mall nearby, too, that is fun to walk into.
- Newtown - vintage shops and stores + restaurants
- Blue Mountains – We didn't make it, but it is apparently amazing. Day Trip outside of Sydney. You can get there via public transit.
 - Yellow Deli – ran by a cult, but it is apparently a really good restaurant in the Blue Mountains
 - Trails: Three sisters, Grand Canyon walk, Katoomba Falls
- Cricket game at Allianz Stadium
- Places to eat:
 - Chambers Fine Coffee – near University of Sydney. Cute cafe and great Aussie brekkie!
 - Spice Alley – near University of Sydney. Nice outdoor area with a bunch of different asian cuisine.
 - Icebergs – BEST VIEWS EVER! It overlooks the pool and Bondi Beach. We walked in for lunch, and got seats in the “bar area” which had great views. It was a smaller menu, but still good. Pricey, but worth it for the views.
 - It's Thai Time – good Thai in Newtown
 - New Shanghai – Chinese in Chatswood (more of a suburb. It was good, but I wouldn't rush there because it's further out)
 - Opera Bar – Touristy restaurant with great views of the Sydney Harbor
 - Chiswick Woollahra – Modern Australian
 - Mr. Wong – Cantonese Food
 - The Potting Shed at the Grounds of Alexandria – Craft cocktails and a visual experience
 - Bathers Pavilion – We went here for the wedding we went to, and it was the best meal we had all trip. It's also right on the harbor, so it is beautiful.
 - King Dynasty – Chinese food in Chatswood
 - Cafe Lautrec – Cute cafe in Paddington. Great meat pies
 - Soda Factory – Rowdy bar
 - Khao Pla – Great Thai in Chatswood. The food is very spicy.
 - Kiva – Coffee shop with good food and outdoor seating in Paddington.
- Overall tips:
 - The public transit is amazing and so cheap! I would highly recommend taking the train and the buses. They are very easy to use, and you can use Apple Pay. Google Maps can be used to figure out your route.
 - Uber or Didi (other rideshare app) work, but Didi is cheaper
 - There are clean public restrooms everywhere. It's awesome.

- Take the ferry at some point! It is super cheap, but it gives you amazing views of the Sydney Opera house. It was incredible!

Byron Bay

- Duration of stay: 2.5 days
- Temperature: 70s/80s
- Where to stay: We stayed in Ewingsdale, which was a bit outside the town. I would recommend staying anywhere within walking distance from the Byron Bay visit center. Ewingsdale was nice, but it was hard to get into town at times.
 - **Accommodations**: [Airbnb](#) at 103 Plantation Drive, Ewingsdale, NSW 2481, Australia
 - Our Airbnb was really nice. It was a private little guest house with a kitchen and living room by the main house. The Airbnb host, Bill and Jeni were so kind, and Bill even drove us into town when we couldn't get an Uber. It was surrounded by nature and really beautiful. Located near the Farm, but you can't walk anywhere from it.
- Things to do:
 - Kayak with Dolphins – We did a tour through [Viator](#). It was fun, but it was hard! The waves were rough, and Ezra got really sea sick.
 - Walk around the town – a really cute town with great shops, restaurants, and clothing stores.
 - There's an Aldi, if you need it, too.
 - Julien Rocks – We didn't do this because I was too scared to swim without a life vest, but it is apparently amazing snorkeling.
 - Byron Bay Lighthouse – easternmost part of Aussie, and beautiful views.
 - Get driven up because it is a steep hill and then walk down
 - The Beach! – All the beaches are connected, but the main ones are Clarkes Beach and Main Beach. There's another beach on the other side of the Lighthouse that is less crowded, but generally, none of the beaches were crowded.
 - Hinterland Magic Glow experience – booked through [Viator](#). Took us to Nightcap National Park to see the rainforest, waterfalls, and the glow worms. It included a yummy local dinner, and we also stopped at a waterfall to swim in before the park.
 - Behind the Bay like a Local Tour – booked through [Viator](#). Was good, but the other tour was better/more structured. Highly recommend all the sites, though.
 - Killen Falls, Lake Ainsworth (tea tree lake, sooo cool), three sisters rocks
 - Byron Bay Farmers Market – only on Thursdays
- Places to eat:
 - Pass Cafe – Yummy cafe on the beach
 - The Canteen – Great coffee shop in a trailer. Get affogatos.
 - The Kiosk – near Lake Ainsworth, best toasties!

- Three Blue Ducks – Farm to table located on The Farm. We saw Sasha Baron Cohen and Isla Fisher there! The food was very farm to table and delicious. Our favorites were the venison tartare and dessert.
- Harvest Newrybar – outside Byron in Hinterland
- Overall tips:
 - We went at the most expensive and crowded time (Christmas time). It was fine, but it made things more expensive, and it was harder to get a place to stay and Ubers.
 - That said, Ubers were SO hard to get at times, especially early in the morning, late at night, or right at noon when people were trying to get into town.
 - We used Byron Private Driver (byronprivatedriver@gmail.com) one day. The driver, Andrew, was so kind and helpful. Highly recommend it! It is definitely more expensive than Uber, though.
 - Didi doesn't work in Byron.
 - Aldi there sells really cheap, high quality sunscreen (and is generally cheaper than in the U.S.).
 - The locals taught us really funny Aussie slang there, but no one knew it anywhere else (e.g., I'm thirsty = I'm drier than a dead dingo's donga)
 - We took the Byron Bay Express from the Byron Bay Interchange to the Gold Coast. It was supposed to drop us off at the Gold Coast Airport, and we just planned to Uber to our Airbnb, but our driver was SOOO nice, and he dropped us off a block from the Airbnb instead because it was on his way. This was an easy and cheap option. It was only about an hour, and it was relatively cheap. Good way to get between
 - We left our bags on the beach without people watching them with no problem. We found people to be more trusting and kind. I didn't see anyone stealing stuff.
 - There are lots of public restrooms by the beach.

Gold Coast

- Duration of stay: 1.5 days
- Temperature: 70s/80s
- Where to stay: We stayed in Palm Beach because we found a good price for an Airbnb. It was really nice, but it was definitely more local. If you are just looking to lay on the beach, it has everything you need. However, Surfer's Paradise and Coolangatta are the more touristy areas. I think Surfers Paradise also has good nightlife.
 - **Accommodations:** [Airbnb](#) at 973 Gold Coast Hwy, Palm Beach QLD 4221, Australia
 - Our Airbnb host Michael was GEM! He had two adorable dogs, Molly and Pushka. He made us an excellent breakfast with the second best cappuccino I've ever had in my life, and his apartment had very nice views. It was right on the beach with a pool, as well. He even drove us to the airport at 4:30 AM because he was worried we wouldn't be able to get an Uber. I seriously loved him so much. The only cons were that his room shared a wall with us, so it felt less private (though, we had our own room,

en suite bathroom, and balcony), and there was no AC (which we didn't realize), so it was really hot at night.

- Things to do:
 - Beach – Beautiful miles and miles of beach
 - Surfing – We booked a surfing experience in Coolangatta through Airbnb that was really fun. I'm not a good swimmer, so I was glad that it was in shallow water. It was easier than I thought!
 - Gold Coast Farmer's Market – only open on Saturdays, but we got great Israeli food and PASSION FRUITS (my favorite)
- Places to eat:
 - The Deli by Peppe – Italian food. Good, not great
 - Chinese Smorgasbord – cheap Chinese food
 - Palm Beach Avenue
 - The Collective – lots of restaurants all in one
 - Frida Sol – Mexican
- Overall tips:
 - This was by far our least favorite place. It just looked a lot like Miami, and the beaches were nicer in Byron. I would still recommend it, but if you are between places, I think you may want to go there instead.
 - Didi and Uber worked, but sometimes they took a long time to get.
 - A lot of the excursions through Viator, etc. left from Surfers Paradise, which wasn't very close to Palm Beach.
 - The airport is close to Palm Beach

Melbourne

- Duration of stay: 3 days
- Temperature: 60s/70s
- Where to stay: We stayed in Southbank, and it was PERFECT. We had a stunning view of the Yarra river, and we were walking distance from pretty much everything we wanted to do.
 - **Accommodations:** [Airbnb](#) at 1 Freshwater Place, Southbank, VIC 3006, Australia
 - Our Airbnb host Jane was the sweetest person. She didn't speak English, only Chinese, but we communicated with her through Google Translate. She made us breakfast and the best cappuccino I've ever had every morning. She also gave us a gift of chocolates when we arrived because it was NYE! Her apartment was stunning with floor to ceiling windows, and it felt very private in our room. The views were breathtaking, and we had front row seats to the NYE fireworks. The building had a pool, gym, and roofdeck. The only con was that it sometimes smelled like cigarette smoke, but only in the main areas, not in our room.
- Things to do:
 - Explore the CBD – main part of the city

- Yarra River – Walk along it. It's beautiful, and there are lots of restaurants and bars on it
- Fitzroy – area with lots of shops
- Hosier Lane – graffiti art street
- Flinders Lane – street in the CBD with lots of stores and restaurants
- Philips Island Tour – booked through [Viator](#), and it was amazing. It was through a company called Gowest, so you can probably book it directly with them, as well. We stopped at Brighton Beach Boxes, Moonlit Sanctuary (saw Koalas, Wallaby, kangaroos, dingoes, Tasmanian devil, emus, and lots of birds), Woolamai Beach, the Nobbies (most stunning views I have ever seen), Cowes (town in Philips Island where we stopped for dinner), Penguin Parade (at night, best part of the trip!)
- Great Ocean Road – we didn't get to this because we had to pick one excursion (and we picked Philips Island). We heard it is beautiful, but it is a lot of driving, and would be more fun to do as a road trip than on a bus.
- State Library Victoria – insane library with a lot of art exhibits. It is beautiful, you must go.
- National Gallery of Victoria – free art museum with great art from all over the world
- Goboat on the Yarra – rent a boat for 1 hour for \$130. You can eat lunch on it.
- Free Walking [Tour](#)
- Places to eat:
 - Chin Chin – Asian fusion, good vibes
 - Prahan Market – a little outside the CBD (have to drive), great meat pies
 - Hu Tang Dumpling Bar in Chinatown
 - Queen Victoria Market
- Overall tips:
 - The metro is free in the CBD
 - The city is really walkable
 - The airport is about 30 minutes from the city. There is a bus from the airport to the city, but it was cheaper for us to Uber (two of us) than to take the bus.
 - Definitely the most cultural and diverse city we went to in Aussie.
 - Magic is a coffee drink only in Melbourne.