

Christmas 2009

Edmonton was the coldest location in North America yesterday with a record setting temperature of -58 degrees Celsius with the wind chill (-72 degrees Fahrenheit)! This pre-Christmas cold snap may be a trend since I also started my letter last year with a cold weather report. Remembering warmer climes

Travels in the Land of Oz

We had been saving our airline points for years in order to take our first major trip overseas to Australia. On Valentine's Day we embarked on our 3 week journey with an 18 hour direct flight to Sydney. Rather than recuperating from our long flight in the expensive capital of Australia, we immediately jumped on another plane to Adelaide located on the Southern coast.

During the few days we were in Adelaide, we got over our jet lag, had our first taste of Australian cuisine (very bland – we will bring some spices on our next overseas trip), and visited (in our opinion) the best zoo of our entire trip. Our true reason for venturing this far south was to visit Kangaroo Island. This 1680 square mile island is located 70 miles off the coast of Adelaide. The isolation of this island for thousands of years has produced a predator free environment (without Dingoes, rabbits or foxes). Over 2 days, our small tour group had a chance to see Western Gray kangaroos, Tamar wallabies, koalas (also



known as Fuzzy Butts), Australian sealions and fur seals, Glossy Black cockatoos, an echidna, and a goanna in the wild. Rami was asked if she would like a job as a wildlife guide after she spotted both a goanna on the side of the road and the wingtips of two enormous manta rays breaking the surface of the ocean far below us. Kangaroo Island also has some amazing scenery including Remarkable Rocks (huge granite rocks carved into amazing shapes by the sea and wind) and Admiral's Arch (a spectacular natural rock arch).

Our next stop was the steamy locale of Cairns, near the top of the continent. The Skyrail Rainforest Cableway allowed us to peer down at the rainforest

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“Smurf” bodysuit (required to prevent deadly jellyfish stings). Dusk in Cairns brought out thousands of giant fruit bats to feed on insects. Not a common sight for Canadians!

After a busy first week Down Under, our mid trip break was to stay

from a gondola that glides just above the tree tops. The gondola had a stop for viewing the 853 feet tall Barron Falls rushing down the mountainside and we also caught a glimpse of a wild turkey in the bush. A trip to the Rainforestation allowed us to pet kangaroos and wallabies, hold a koala and an alligator, and attempt to throw a boomerang. Our first day in Australia’s rainforest was completed with a trip back down the mountain on the historic Kuranda Scenic Railway. The next day we travelled by catamaran to the edge of the Great Barrier Reef to snorkel. We also saw this amazing living organism from the air (Rami’s first helicopter ride) and Joe looked fetching in his blue

near Brisbane at the resort city called Gold Coast. Body surfing, walking on the “squeaky” fine white sand beaches and trying not to get too sunburned filled up our days. Joe learned to drive on the wrong side of the road with only slight damage to the rental vehicle (including indentations left by Rami’s fingers). This allowed us to visit Byron Bay which has a beautiful beach to spend some time bobbing in the waves. The ocean temperature at the time of year that we visited was the same as the air temperature (26 to 33 degrees Celsius). We had a slight scare when Joe had his glasses swept off by a large wave. Luckily they were found by a

helpful bystander while we were panicking. His other pair of glasses were an hour’s drive away and he was the driver!

After a relaxing week at Gold Coast, we flew back to Sydney to explore the big city. Some highlights included seeing dugongs and platypus at the aquarium, a behind the scenes tour at both the zoo and the Sydney Opera House and viewing the Southern night sky from a 130 year old telescope at the Sydney observatory. If you plan on visiting Sydney, we would highly recommend climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It takes 3 hours and your legs will ache for at least the rest of the day but the views of the city, opera house and the harbour made it well worth the effort expended.

Our trip ended with a 70 degree temperature change as when we arrived back in Edmonton after a 24 hour journey it was minus 40! Both of us would go back in a minute if we had the time and the funds. *Any sponsors?*

If you would like to see more pictures of our Australia adventures, please visit thechowaniecs.com or look us up on Facebook.

Other Adventures

We attended three concerts this year, one in Edmonton, one in Vancouver and one in Las Vegas. The first was Coldplay in Edmonton in June. Joe paid them his ultimate concert compliment when he said that the concert was the 2nd best he had even attended (of course, U2 would be the best). Kylie Minogue toured North America for the first time so we



travelled to Las Vegas at the beginning of October to catch her amazing laser and music extravaganza. For our final concert, we flew to Vancouver at the end of October to see U2. We have also purchased tickets to see them again in Edmonton in June. Yes, they are that good!



Rami's 40th birthday in June was celebrated in style with a trip to the Calgary Zoo for a behind the scenes tour that included feeding the giraffes (her favorite animal) and massaging the hippo's gums. This was followed by a weekend of golfing in Kananaskis with Norm and Jenny (which we plan to repeat again next summer but extend it to a week).

Remtechalot (ESAA's highly successful conference with a Monty Python theme this year) was enjoyed by both of us this year. Rami took time off to join in the fun and fundraise for the Ilsa Mae Research Fund. A cheque was presented to Muscular Dystrophy Canada at the conference for **\$100,000!** We have reached our initial goal! Now we need to find some SMA research to spend it on.

Rami expanded her role as a pharmacist this year as she took training to become an immunizing pharmacist. She is now authorized to give vaccinations to anyone over 12 years of age and has been involved this fall in giving both seasonal and H1N1 flu shots.

Our last adventure of this year was a visit to Vegas at the beginning of December. We had a great time visiting with Rami's grandparents, Aunt Jewel, Uncle Jim and Cousin Peter. We also attended our 3rd Cirque de Soleil show, Ka. And no visit to Vegas would be complete without some shopping (Rami is dressed by Vegas)!

Holiday Plans

Christmas and New Year's at the Chowaniecs will involve staying close to the warm fireplace, visiting with family and friends and snuggling with our animals on the couch.

Wishing you and your family a happy, healthy holiday season.

**RAMI, Joe, *Bela*,
RUCKUS and ODO**

