

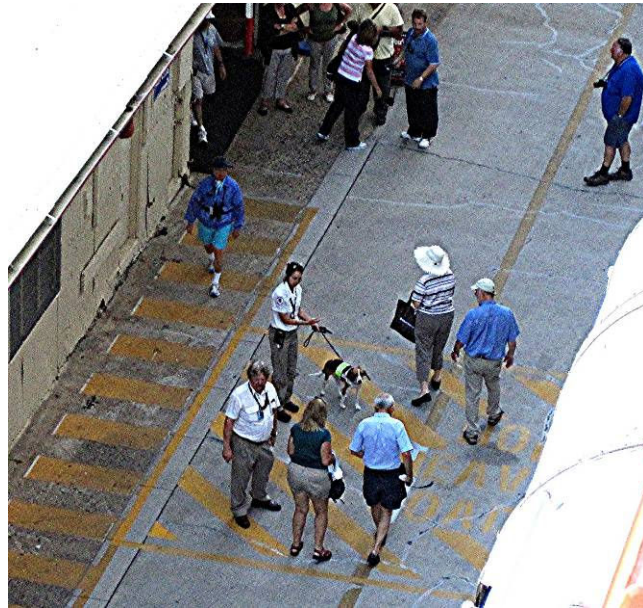
**Day 30 – Cairns, Australia –Kurunda Scenic Railway – Skyrail – 26 Oct. 09:** The

day started with bright sunshine and cloudless sky over Cairns, Australia. Two years ago when we visited Cairns it was a rainy dismal day and this morning looked just the opposite. The picture on the left shows our view of Cairns this morning, just for the record.



Our plan for the day was to go on a tour called The Kurunda Experience that we had purchased from Holland American. The tour would take us up to the mountain village of Kurunda by way of a narrow gauge scenic railroad that was built along the cliffs of the Barron River Gorge. We would be returned to the Cairns area by way of a 6 mile long cable-gondola ride over the top of the rain forest.

Our tour left the ship about 9:30 and we made our way past the hard working “Dog of Cairns”. The plant quarantine program of Australia includes the use of specially trained dogs to sniff containers carried by tourists to detect and prevent people from carrying prohibited food items ashore. We had taken this photo on the right while the “sniffer dog” was



doing his thing on the pier. We have never seen anyone caught with actual contraband food. However, once a man in front of us was stopped by a false alarm when the dog detected that he had previously carried bananas in his back pack. We didn't see any other dogs in Cairns but this hard working guy made a good showing.

We made it past the Dog of Cairns and boarded our bus. Our guide's name was Vickie and the driver's name was Bevan. Bevan did most of the description of the passing scene for us. On the way out of Cairns we passed the Shell gas station shown on the right. It was selling unleaded gasoline for \$1.229 Australian dollars (AUD) per liter. The exchange rate today was \$1 USD for \$0.99 AUD so a liter of gas costs \$1.24 USD. Assuming 4 liters per gallon, \$1.24 per liter works out to \$4.96 USD per gallon. That's a little less than the \$5.24 USD per gallon that we saw for gas in Port Vila. Maybe that makes the Aussies returning from a Port Vila vacation a little happier to be back home.



The bus dropped us off at a town called Freshwater. This town got its name from the fact that drinking water for the early settlers in Cairns was obtained from the Barron River at this site. The Kuranda Scenic Railway connects Cairns and the mountain village of Kuranda and it has a station at Freshwater. The total length of the rail line is only 22 miles but when it was built in 1891 it was a life saver for gold miners living in the mountains who were isolated and needed supplies from Cairns. A modern highway now connects the mountain villages with Cairns but because the railway was constructed through such scenic territory, it has been restored and operated as a major tourist attraction for the area. We boarded the Kuranda Scenic Railway at Freshwater for the 13 mile journey up the mountain to Kuranda. Our empty bus followed us and we met it in Kuranda.



At first we passed through open area with fields and housing developments on land gently sloping up towards the mountains in front of us. The fields were mostly used for growing sugar cane and this field shown on the left had a new crop that looked very vigorous. Sugar cane plantations are a major business of this area in Australia.



Housing developments, similar to many large cities, had been built here, amongst the sugar cane fields, in the outskirts of Cairns.



The train track soon became steeper and we quickly gained altitude. The railway had been built with great effort by hewing



and rolling as the diesel electric locomotive pulled us up the mountain.

There were many sharp bends in the track as it wound up the canyon. This photo on the below is one we got to illustrate one of these bends.



Before it disappeared behind us, we got a picture of the Cairns area valley as we climbed up the mountain.

Part of the fun ambiance of the trip was the old fashioned rail cars we were in, as shown below. The narrow gauge railroad bed was a bit uneven and that led to much rocking



The highlight of the 13 mile trip up the mountain was the stop at Barron River Falls where we got off the train temporarily and took these pictures. The top of the falls is about 1000 feet above sea level and the water cascades down almost 900 feet to the Barron River at the bottom.



There were many other beautiful but less dramatic views like this as we climbed up the mountain.

We arrived at the mountain top railway station in the village of Kuranda. Our bus was there to take us a short distance to the market area of Kuranda. We had about 1.5 hours to browse around and get lunch before the scheduled ride down the mountain on the Skyway. Kuranda is a charming little town with lots of shops for Australian and international tourists.

Here are a few photos from around Kuranda.

These street signs in the central Round About gave directions to the Doctor, Toilets, Library and a Parking Lot.



Like other shops we saw in the Cairns area this sweet shop had a sign written with Japanese characters to attract the many Japanese tourists.



There were several stores that carried crafts related to the Aboriginal culture. We eventually found some cylindrical wooden “clappers” that we decided to buy. The clappers are made of hardwood and make a sharp knocking sound when tapped together. The ones we found were decorated in an Aboriginal pattern by the Aboriginal artist, named Boonga, who was at his bench in the store. Our tradition is to get a picture of the artist when buying artwork with a cultural connection. This shop charged \$10 just to take a picture of the Aboriginal artist but if you bought one of his works a photograph with him was “free”. Using distorted “tourist“ logic we considered this a \$10 discount on the sales price (\$25) and went for the clapper purchase including a picture of Barbara with Boonga as shown on the right. Unfortunately, the clappers were already bundled up in a package when we took the picture so they displayed a boomerang in



the photo. As a fix to this disconnect we took a picture of Barbara holding the clappers when we returned to the Amsterdam, as shown on the left.

The time rolled around for us to get back on the bus and go to the famous Skyrail for our ride back down to the Cairns area. The busses were parked on the main street of Kuranda. One of the drivers had displayed some Aussie wit in the “Destination” banner at the front of his bus, as shown on the right.



Fortunately, our bus was not “Lost” and we were able to get a quick ride to the Skyrail which was nearby. We each got tickets to the Skyrail as we got off the bus and made our way into the gondola loading area. The Skyrail consists of a series of tall stations connected by cables that carry passengers in closed gondolas. The route takes you about 6 miles over the canopy of the rainforest below. A claim was made that this is the longest cable ride of this type in the world. Large helicopters were used to bring in and position the stanchions so that damage to the rainforest was minimized. No access roads to the base of the stanchions were allowed. There are two stations along the 6 mile route where you can get off the gondola and walk around a nature trail in the rain forest and then reboard a different gondola to continue your trip. The gondolas are on a continuous cable so that you can buy tickets to go up or down the mountain or round trip. The attraction of the facility is that as your gondola quietly glides just 20 or 30 feet above the rain forest it is possible to see and photograph colorful birds and butterflies as well as ferns, palms, eucalyptus and other scenery.



Along with passengers from the other busses from the Amsterdam we got into the line for boarding the gondolas. This picture on the right shows some passengers being loaded into a gondola at the Kuranda station. The gondola on the left is loaded and headed out of the station. The gondola in the middle is being loaded while the attendant holds the door open.



Once loaded and on our way there was quietness with only the sound of the rollers when we passed over the stanchions. We got busy taking pictures of the forest scenery as it passed below. Here are some examples.

In this photograph on the right we are suspended from the cable on the left while the empty gondola on the right is headed up the mountain. We are passing over the Barron River with the dense rain forest on the shore.



The view below shows a stanchion as we looked down the mountain towards Cairns.



We could look down into the rain forest and see green parrots and blue butterflies but it was not possible to catch them in a picture. The gondola was moving at a brisk pace and the flying targets were flitting between trees so there was simply not enough time to get a camera on them.





This picture on the right shows what was probably our closest approach to the forest canopy.



This was the view of Barron Falls from the Skyrail gondola, as shown below.



At the second station on the way down the mountain we got out of the gondola and



examined some displays of forest creatures and plant life. The cassowary is a large flightless bird that inhabits the rainforest but is very rarely sighted. They had a display showing a cassowary and a couple chicks that we could photograph, as shown on the left.

We got back onto a gondola and proceeded down the mountain. When we cleared the next peak the view we got is shown in the picture below. The Coral Sea stretches out from the farmland located north of Cairns.



Although the pictures make the ride look a little like a roller coaster it actually was a fairly serene experience with most of the energy going in to looking for another bird or butterfly.

As we approached the base station north of Cairns the small lake shown below took on some detail. It turned out to be set up for water skiing with different kinds of jumps and challenging courses marked by buoys.



As we neared the base station they had a camera rigged to take our picture. We hammed it up and then purchased the picture (\$14) shown on the left.

We were happy with the ride but were disappointed that it was not possible to get pictures of birds and butterflies from the gondola. If we had not been on a tour with a definite schedule for getting down to the bottom base station we could have lingered at the two intermediate stations in the rain forest. That would have given us more opportunity to see and photographs the animals and plant life. The brochure for the Skyrail recommends getting off at the stations to look around.

After browsing through the inevitable gift shop we went out to where the buses were parked and waiting.

There was a tree with a brilliant red flower near the parking lot. There were some large seed pod on the tree and the bus drivers said the tree was called a Black Bean. There were some brightly flowered trees in the rain forest that were called Flame Trees. Flame Tree seems like a better name for a tree with this flower but, whatever, here is a picture of the flower on the right.



We got back on the bus and within 20 minutes we were riding along the waterfront park of Cairns. Cairns has a wonderful waterfront park with lots of athletic facilities and children's play equipment. We also got a view of the several types of home construction in the Cairns area. A popular design puts the house up on pilings that allow air to circulate under the house to provide a cooling breeze. Some examples of houses we saw are shown below.



As we neared Trinity Pier and the Cruise Terminal the driver turned onto Abbot Street. We drove by Woolworth's and The Reef Hotel which shares the domed building with the Casino. It was 3pm and we didn't have to be back on the Amsterdam by 4:30. We decided to get off the bus on Abbot Street since we were within sight of the Amsterdam and it didn't seem like a big risk to get in a little more time in Cairns.

We strolled the streets and window shopped. The stores in this photo on the right, like many shops in the area, include Japanese characters in some of their store signage. The store in the picture below seemed to be a typical souvenir store and it had no signs in English.



We needed to pick up some batteries and diet Coke so when we saw this Woolworth store in the photo on the right we walked right in. The Woolworth stores in Australia carry everything that a Super Wal Mart carries in the US. We felt right at home. We picked up the batteries and cokes that we needed and walked back to the Amsterdam.



The ship got underway about 5pm and we were pleased by the fact that some of the people from Cairns came down to the pier to see us off. In this picture below the cruise terminal is the large building on the left and the people have gathered in the public part of the pier on the right.



As the Amsterdam sailed out of the harbor we passed by many of the private boats anchored across the harbor from the yacht basin and Trinity Pier where we had docked. The many boats in this picture below and elsewhere around the harbor attests to the fact that the Australian people have a strong maritime heritage.



The Amsterdam took the same route out through the Great Barrier Reef that we had used on the way in to Cairns. We went to early dinner before the Amsterdam turned south towards Brisbane, Australia. The sun was beaming in to the dining room as it settled behind the mountains of Australia and Barbara was able to get this photo shown below.



This seemed like an excellent way to end the day.

We will be at sea for two days and then we arrive in Brisbane on 29 October.