

travel



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SENSATIONAL SYDNEY

A thriving art scene and inspired appellations paired with kangaroos and the 2016 NCAA college football season opener make for a marvelous detour Down Under

Photos and story by Julie L. Kessler
 Special to Star Advertiser

IT MUST be said: Within minutes of each time I've come to Sydney, I've wanted to unpack my bags and move in. Permanently. A sparklingly clean, walkable city with about 5 million people blessed with natural beauty, temperate weather and diverse neighborhoods — Sydney-siders are an undeniably friendly lot. And like many of the fine wines I tasted in the Hunter Valley, Sydney is a city that just gets better with age.

The Westfield Tower Eye with viewing platform stands more than 1,000 feet above the heart of Sydney's central business district.

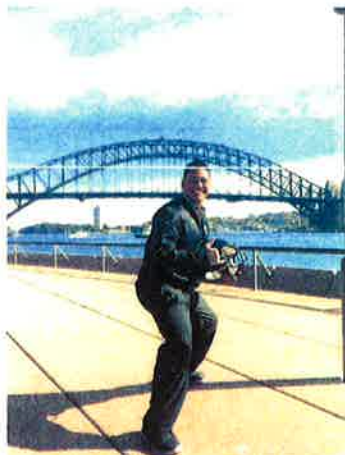
IF YOU GO . . .

Sydney

~> **The best way:** Hawaiian Airlines, Virgin Australia and Jetstar have nonstop service starting at \$908 round trip.
 ~> **Getting around:** The best way to see Sydney is by foot. The metro rail network called Sydney Trains is easy, frequent and convenient. Taxis are metered and plentiful, even during rush hour.

WHERE TO STAY:

~> The Intercontinental Hotel, a stone's throw from the Opera House, harbor and Botanic Garden, is built around the heritage-listed 1851 Treasury Building. Doubles start at \$241; 117 Macquarie St., Intercontinental.com.
 ~> For the uber-trendy, the QT Sydney rocks. Next to State Theater, near Hyde Park, shopping and a 15-minute walk to Circular Quay, QT was built in the former Gowings department store. Rooms are spacious, eclectically hip and con-



University of Hawaii Rainbow Warrior running back Steven Lakalaka enjoys Sydney near Harbor Bridge.

tain hilarious minibar items such as emergency hot Her Urban spa. Rooms start at \$218 including WiFi; 49 Market St., (J)Hotelsandresorts.com.

WHERE TO EAT:

~> Bennelong, Sydney Opera House, Bennelong.com.au
 ~> Anason, 5/23 Barangaroo Ave., Anason.com.au

~> Chiswick at the Gallery, 1 Art Gallery Road, Chiswickrestaurant.com.au

~> No. 1 Bent Street, onebentstreet.com.au

~> Bills Bondi, 79 Half St., bills.com.au
 ~> Spice Alley Kopi-Tiam for Asian, hawker-style casual dining; 18 Kensington St., kensingtonstreet.com.au

Art lover's mecca

Near the University of Sydney — Australia's first college, designed to mimic Oxford and Cambridge — is Newtown neighborhood. Possessing architecture and plasterwork inspired from early European settlement, the '60s and '70s brought migrants, rockers, goths and punks who left their slightly raffish mark. Now there's a lively Bohemian charm with retro shops, bookstores, co-op galleries, cafes and several socially conscious stores like King Street's Social Outfit, a label that educates and employs refugees and recent migrants. The label's silk clothing and home goods are both beautiful and affordable.

Along other Newtown streets, there's an abundance of street art, courtesy of local tag artists commissioned by the city to beautify building walls that would otherwise fall prey to graffiti. In fact, completely, once these murals are completed, walls remain untagged.

Conveniently, I reached Black Star Pastry just as it started to rain. Here a cultlike following comes to eat its strawberry watermelon rose water cake. Originally concocted as a favor for a friend's wedding, today Black Star has three Sydney locations selling 20,000 slices a week of this hand-cut cake.

Another creative neighborhood also on Sydney's southern edge is Chippendale. Originally home to Carlton & United Brewery, along with 19th- and 20th-century slums, plague and hosts of motley characters, today it has gentrified into a cool precinct without losing its artsy vibe. More than a dozen galleries inhabit a few blocks. Most notable: contemporary Chinese art at White



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Rabbit Gallery. Spot 81 had an excellent collection of Ardmore Zulu ceramics, and Harrington Street Gallery shows locally trained artists.

At the edge of the Royal Botanic Garden, the Art Gallery of NSW has a permanent collection of Asian, Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander art in a magnificent setting. With 30 temporary exhibits annually, there's art for everyone. I was lucky to catch the outstanding Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera exhibition.

A foodie's nirvana

Sydney's food and wine scene is world class, with no shortage of innovative, farm-to-table and creative cuisine combinations.

Following a long walk by The Rocks and Circular Quay with spectacular views of Sydney's glorious harbor, I entered Bennelong restaurant, inside the iconic Sydney Opera House. Feeling like I was dining under the luxury sails of a massive boat, I sat at the Curved and Curved Counter, watching the chefs work deftly while wondering how they still possessed fingers. The Red Claw Yabbies (crayfish) served with lemon marmalade, cultured cream and buckwheat picklets were outstanding, ditto the roasted carrot salad beside sheep-milk feta adorned in sherry caramel dressing.

With floor-to-ceiling windows, Chiswick at the Gallery takes advantage of spectacular views. An adjacent kitchen garden explained the food's freshness. The honey-roasted pumpkin with holy goat cheese and pickled baby turnips were divine. Grilled prawns with pine nuts and bell/loom tomatoes exploded with flavor.

In Sydney's new Barangaroo precinct, a

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SYDNEY

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former container wharf redesigned into a harbor headland. I found Anason, a Turkish restaurant headed by chef and cookbook author Somer Sivrioğlu. The juicy, no-knife-needed lamb neck fillet served on an eggplant begendi with pomegranate seeds and grilled artichoke had me surrendering to my inner Anatolian.

No. 1 Bent Street is another delightful restaurant serving small plates to be shared. Highlights were the tuna tatak and grilled squid with chorizo.

On the hunt in Hunter Valley

Just two hours north of Sydney, the drive to Hunter Valley is easy — once you remember to stay on the wrong ... that is, the left side of the road. Amid bucolic rolling hills, meandering vineyards and kangaroos aplenty, some fantastic appellations await.

When visiting a tasting room anywhere in the world, normally I find two or three samples to my liking out of a lengthy selection. At our first stop at the McGuigan family's Tempus Two in Pokolbin, I liked all 10 samples poured. Stellar standouts were the 2015 Semillon for which the Hunter Valley is well known, and the 2014 Shiraz, which cellar manager Daniel Briant said was the best vintage since 1969. My swooning nearly became embarrassing.

A few doors down, the Smelly Cheese Shop has an excellent selection of domestic and imported cheeses, olives and other perfect accompaniments to accompany those gratifying grapes.

My second stop was Keith Tulloch Winery. Unlike many dark tasting rooms, Tulloch possesses grand, floor-to-ceiling French doors with large verandas and airy vistas of the Brokeback Mountains and vineyards, no doubt inspired by Keith's wife's tenure as a Laura Ashley designer in London.

Tulloch was the perfect location for wine and chocolate pairing, since Cocoa Nib, an artisan shop headed by chocolate queen Aymee Slaveiro, is downstairs. A



JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Sydney's iconic Opera House by day.

IF YOU GO ...

Hunter Valley

WHERE TO STAY:

Chateau Elan, set amid vineyards and a Greg Norman-designed golf course, has abundant resident kangaroos milling about with themed guest rooms — mine was Amsterdam — complete with books and films on Holland. Rooms start at \$179 including Wi-Fi; 1 Vintage Drive, Rothbury, Chateauelan.com.au.

TASTING ROOMS

(Mostly called cellar doors in Sydney-speak):

- >> Tempus Two, corner of Broke & McDonalds roads, Pokolbin, Tempustwo.com.au
- >> Keith Tulloch, Hermitage Road, Pokolbin, keithtullochwine.com
- >> Usher Tinkler Wines, 97 McDonalds Road, Pokolbin, ushertinklerwines.com

WHERE TO EAT

- >> EXP Restaurant, inventive farm-to-table cuisine with five- or eight-course tasting menus paired with premium Oakvale wine selections prepared by Frank Fawcner, a chef who clearly loves his calling, 1596 Broke Road, Pokolbin, exprestaurant.com.au
- >> Peterson's Champagne House for breakfast amid the vines with excellent blush sparkling wine, Broke Road & Wine Country Drive, Pokolbin, petersonhouse.com.au

For more information: visitnsw.com

plate of crisp lemon pralines. Malibu white chocolate, and banana-spiced and orange chocolate bonbons was paired with 2015 and 2016 Semillons, a 2013 Kester Shiraz and a 2014 Botrytis "Noble Rot" Semillon. This was a chocoholic oenophile's marriage made in heaven.

The most unique wine-tasting experience in the region is Usher Tinkler's, where tasting is convened in a church built in 1905. Original stained-glass windows and period decor, including a working vinyl player, set the tone for good wines with fabulous salami and cheese boards. LaTur, a trifeata of creamy goat, sheep and cow cheeses from Italy's

Piemonte region, when paired with locally sourced Paxton honey and Tinkler's "Nose to Tail," comprising 70 percent Semillon and 30 percent Chardonnay, is a near-religious experience. For a more traditional religious experience, in July 1925 chef Daniel Shafer's fiancée's grandparents Dorothy Locoock and Lewis Kilner were married precisely where we were toasting their union.

The Sydney Cup

Up to now football in Australia meant soccer. However, with the 2016 NCAA college football season opening at Sydney's Anzac Stadium, featuring a game

between the University of Hawaii Rainbow Warriors and University of California, Berkeley, Golden Bears, American-style football is no longer a stranger Down Under.

For this inaugural Sydney Cup, more than 61,000 came to watch, including many American fans and alumni arriving by car or by Sydney's convenient rail system.

The 2000 Olympics showcase stadium, Anzac has all the bells and whistles. While that was insufficient to make my Hawaii alma mater win, there were at least two UH fan winners in the crowd: Emma Allen said yes during halftime when Benjie Sacchetta proposed in front of thousands. Just like in the game of life, one must always look at the bright side.

Bondi and eastern beaches

No trip to Sydney would be complete without a day at famous Bondi, just 20 minutes from Sydney's center. At Bills Bondi, the fluffy banana ricotta hotcakes with honey-caramelized butter left me giddy.

Walking down Campbell Parade, the Bondi Public School holds a Sunday open market where, among traditional crafts, new designers showcase their creations alongside tarot card readers who might suggest a long walk is in order.

Embarking on the "Bondi to Coggee Coastal Walk," I traversed nearly 4 miles with hundreds of locals and their four-legged compatriots. Along stunning panoramas, bays, cliffs and rock pools, I passed through the hilltop Waverly Cemetery, arguably the most gorgeous resting place on the planet.

At Coggee I was treated to a lively concert of Lebanese music by the proprietors of Knafeh Jerusalem Street Food, a mobile outdoor bakery set in a shipping container transformed with street art. Thus ended a perfect day that ended a perfect week.

No matter how you choose to spend your time in Sydney, when it comes time to leave, you might be afflicted with dreams of expatriating. Fair dinkum — it's true — as Aussies say. Instead, perhaps you can swiftly start planning another Sydney sojourn.