

# Stephen M. Yoss

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Sydney, New South Whales, Australia

## G'Day from Australia!

On August 18th, I departed the chilly climates and familiarity of Wellington, New Zealand for the balmy and unknown of Cairns, Australia. I said goodbye to my life as a Kiwi and started on my journey around the world. After a brief layover in Brisbane, I made it to Cairns in the late afternoon. Thankfully, the weather, attractions, and people were not a disappointment. Australia was everything that I hoped it would be; a thrilling adventure through city and bush. I spent approximately two weeks exploring the famed east coast, from Cairns to Sydney. I dove the reefs of the tropics,

rode outback of New South Whales, and the explored the metropolis that is Sydney. The only disappointment was that I had to continue traveling. However, I found comfort in knowing that it would only be a matter of time before I returned to its beautiful shores.

### The Great Barrier Reef

As you might remember I first experienced diving earlier this year in the waters of Fiji. That wonderful experience stayed with me over the last several months. When planning my travels, diving the Great Barrier Reef was at the top of my to-do list. Before I could go below the waterline at the Reef, I had to become more



*Above: Steve with a wild Sea Turtle at the Saxon Reef. The Saxon Reef is one of thousands of reefs that form the Great Barrier Reef. Below: The ever popular, Clown Fish, better known to some as Nemo. These beautiful fish are common in the reefs outside Cairns, Australia.*

skilled in the art of submersion and earn my PADI dive certification.

Cairns has as many dive schools as Hollywood has aspiring actors, so there were plenty of companies to choose from. I decided to do my certification and trip with the Deep Sea Diver's Den with instructor Peter Lloyd which both had a wonderful reputation. My first two days in Cairns were spent either at the bottom of a pool or in a classroom learning the theory of diving. When the basics were completed I packed my gear and left for wetter climates, eager to explore the ocean below.

It wasn't until my training was over and I was certified that I was able to explore the reefs



at my leisure. The reefs are manifold with flora and fauna. Just when you think you can not be any more amazed or dazzled by the surroundings, a different shark, sea turtle, or colorful fish swims into view. When I wasn't in the water I spent my time enjoying the comforts of the boat which was a pleasant departure from hostels. The OceanQuest is a purpose built



*My diving group while aboard OceanQuest. Our group was very international with Japanese, Dutch, Aussie, English, Israeli, French, and of course American. While aboard we were diving together between four to five times a day.*



**Top:** A Cuttlefish with its tentacles expanded. This fish is a close relative to the squid. It can change colors to suit its surroundings. **Bottom:** Another view of a sea turtle. Words cannot describe how majestic these animals are in the wild. They don't really swim, but glide through the water.

dive boat loaded with amenities that allows the guest to dive and relax in relative comfort for a competitive price. Each passenger would pay a set fee which would include accommodation, dive equipment, food, and transportation. Therefore, the relative cost of each dive was around \$25 (AUS). I enjoyed it so much that I spent three days onboard. While there I completed a total of ten dives at the Saxon and Norman Reefs. If you dive or are remotely interested, I

highly recommend this company and location.

In the middle of my trip I participated in a night dive on the Saxon Reef. As on land the environment completely changes when the sun sets. As I submerged into the dark waters it felt less like diving and more like a trip into outer space. When I reached the reef almost instantly the differences between night and day became apparent. The aquatic life that you become accustomed to during the day goes to sleep and

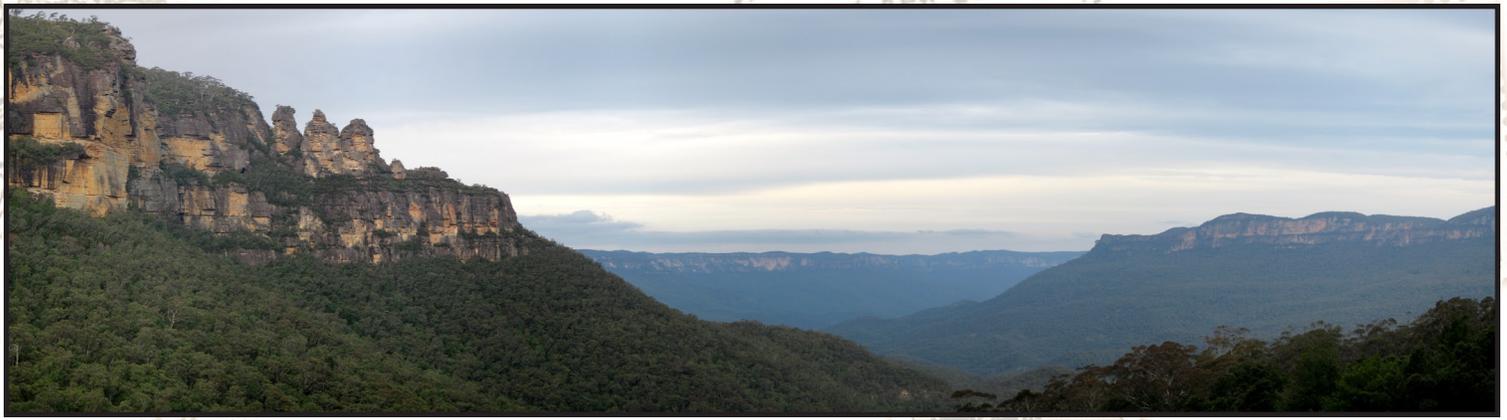
the nocturnal animals come out to play. As you swim slowly through the murky depths you must keep reminding yourself that you are still on Earth as there is nothing else to remind you. The best way to describe it would be if you were to ride on roller coaster at night with no music or track leading your way. Of all my dives this was certainly my favorite and most memorable.

### Surfer's Paradise

After leaving Cairns I made my way down the East Coast to Surfer's Paradise. Surfer's Paradise is a suburb of the Gold Coast that poorly tries to compare itself to Miami, Florida. When originally planning my trip, I thought that Surfer's would be an interesting tourist destination. Almost immediately I came to realize that it was more Disneyland than authentic Australia. So I made a game time



*I could not leave Australia without testing the waves. I hired the largest board I could... It felt as if I was riding a bus when I was on the water!*

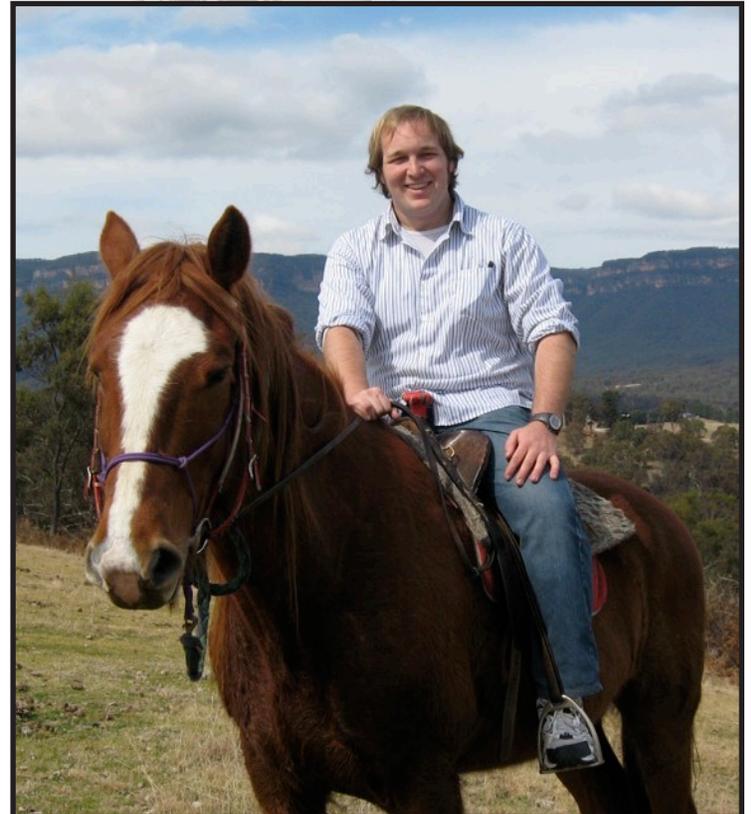


decision and changed my destination to Byron Bay. An advantage of traveling independently is the ability tailor your trip specific to your personal wants and needs.

### Byron Bay

Byron Shire (aka Byron Bay) is between Brisbane and Sydney, but closer to Brisbane. It is a small, sleepy, surfing village that prides itself from being anything but normal. While in Byron I stayed at the Art's Factory hostel. The only way to describe it would

be as a hippy commune. I finally understand the whole concept behind Haight-Ashbury and the summer of love. The accommodation was in the forest, away from the locals and other tourists (for good reason). While at the commune I was slept in a tepee, participated in a drum circle, discussed the advantages of organic food, and lastly the American corporations dominating the world. Although it certainly was not the Hilton, it was memorable, cheap, unique, and a lot of fun. If you are ever in



Byron, bring your bongos and join in on the fun.

While in Byron I tried my luck at surfing. God has blessed me with many gifts in my life, but balance and coordination are not some of my better talents. Unfortunately, those are the minimum requirements for surfing. Thankfully, I had a skilled veteran as a coach and a board twice as tall as me. After several painful attempts I finally was able to stand up! Although admittedly not for long. As with most

things in life, practice makes perfect. I'm confident that with more time in the water I might even ride a full wave someday.

### The Blue Mountains and Megalong Ranch

When I arrived in New South Wales I immediately took a train outside Sydney to the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains get their name from the fact that they appear blue due to the reflection of the light against the minerals in



**Top:** A panoramic view of the "Three Sisters" and surrounding forests. The "Three Sisters" are the most famous peaks in Australia's Blue Mountains. The name comes from an ancient Aboriginal myth. **Middle:** Horseback riding in the same mountain range. **Bottom:** Another view of the "Three Sisters. Forest for as far as the eye can see!



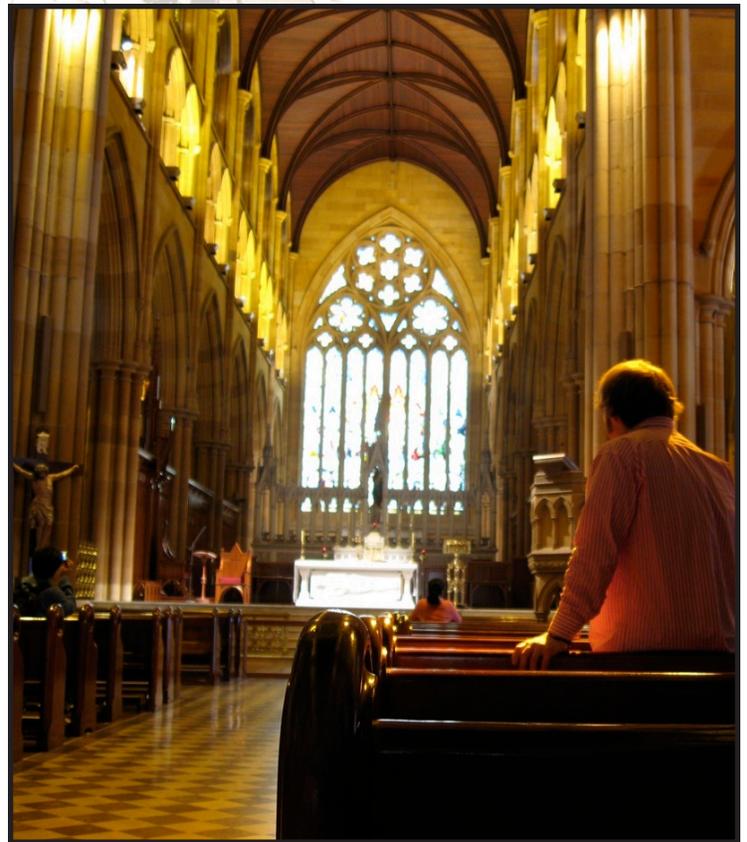
the rock. In my eternal quest to get off the beaten tail, I found myself staying at the Mega-long Heritage Farm and Ranch. When I arrived I was greeted with a hearty handshake, warm campfire, and frosty Tully's beer. I immediately knew that this destination would differ to any place I had stayed prior. Throughout the night I was entertained by the songs and folklore of the region delivered by an authentic cowboy. The next morning I set out on a horse ride that would take me through the sights of the area. While on the ride I saw wild kangaroos with their joeys, wallabies, and other native animals. The highlight of the weekend came in the simple pleasure of laying on my back and watching the night sky. With a little help from Pink Floyd and ample time I was able to appreciate the beauty of simple starlight.

## Sydney

Much like ADG's Jamaican Me Crazy, Sydney lives up to its reputation of being one of the best cities down under.

Simply, it is a beautiful, elegant, young, and fun city. It is the kind of city that you boast about living in or going to. Although I only spent a few wonderful days there, it is definitely a future travel destination. While in Sydney I saw the major sights such as Bondi Beach, the Opera House, Darling Harbor, the Harbor Bridge, etc.

I will share two of the many highlights the city has to offer, Darling Harbor and the Opera House. Darling Harbor is comparable to Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, but on the water in Sydney. It offers an eclectic variety of restaurants, shops, bars, attractions and museums. The Australian Maritime Museum caught my attention in particular. Not only did the museum have an entire section dedicated to the good ol' USA Navy but they had two former warships available for tour, the HMAS (Her Majesty's Australian Ship) Vampire and Onslow. The Vampire was a destroyer armed with 4.5" guns and the Onslow was an attack submarine. I was able to tour



*Top: A view of the visually stunning Sydney Harbour, Opera House and Bridge. Middle: A quiet moment at St. Mary's cathedral in Sydney. This church is a beautiful example of Gothic architecture in the Southern Hemisphere. Bottom: On the harbour in front of the Opera House. Sydney employs a fleet of ferries for the purpose of public transportation. As a backpacker, they are a great way to have a cheap harbour cruise.*



**Top:** Steve at the Opera House with the Harbor Bridge in the background. **Middle:** A view of the interior of the concert hall at the Opera House. This venue is used exclusively for orchestral/chamber music. **Bottom:** Steve with a joey (baby kangaroo) at Surfer's Paradise, Gold Coast.

both vessels and they are great examples of Cold War military technology.

As most people know I have a soft spot in my heart for opera and classical music. Any opera aficionado knows that the Sydney Opera House is a mecca and a must see in the Southern Hemisphere. The building was completed in 1973 and sits in the middle of downtown Sydney directly across from the Harbor Bridge. The building is stunningly beautiful, almost acoustically perfect and in a great location. It was designed by Jørn Utzon and the inspiration came from the look of a peeled orange. From a distance it appears pure white, but it turns to cream the closer you get to the building. The Opera House is actually a combination of different purpose built structures. While it is known for Opera, there are specialized theaters

for concerts, plays, and drama. Each theater was specially designed to accommodate the particulars of the style.

While in Sydney I had tickets for Handel's Orlando, which is an Opera about torn lovers and betrayal. Thanks to my trusty LMU student ID I was able to score an amazing seat for minor cash. The performance, costumes, music, and set design were amazing. The entire experience was memorable from the brilliant performance to the building tour prior to the show.

My next destination is Thailand. As the saying goes, changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes! I have warm weather, cheap prices and beautiful beaches to look forward to. Thank you for reading. Another edition will be out in a few weeks. Life is hard... All the best. **Cheers! --Steve**