

Homes & Leisure

Home pics 8 Lakeshore Dr., Sackville **F8-9** | **Design** Stained glass is a showstopper **F7**



The spectacular Sydney skyline is easily distinguished by the iconic Opera House and Harbour Bridge. Take a ferry to the Taronga Zoo for this vantage point. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

SAY G'DAY TO SYDNEY

The sights and sounds of this multicultural Australian city make the long haul to get there well worth it

CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

It seemed destined to happen: this Sydney, N.S., native was venturing to Sydney, Australia, to meet up with a daughter named Sidney.

But since this mama isn't a big fan of lengthy flights, I debated making the trek, wondering whether the epic voyage – including 13 hours of continuous flying from L.A. to Oz – would be worth a jumbled internal clock and sweaty palms over the Pacific Ocean.

Fortunately, all went well for my husband, older daughter and I on the journey, which saw us land at Sydney Airport on a sunny, mid-December day, not far into Australia's summer. The 20 C-plus temperatures made up for the

long haul and adjustment to the time zone, 15 hours ahead of Moncton time.

After a rendezvous with my younger daughter, my family barely wasted a second before we began exploring Sydney, a metropolis on the country's east coast.

Why, you may wonder, did we limit ourselves to Oz's most populous city during our two-week visit?

In a nutshell (macadamia, of course), size matters.

Australia may be the world's sixth-largest nation and the planet's smallest continent, but it's still massive, measuring about 7.7 million square kilometres, compared to Canada's roughly 10 million. Rather than spend just a few days in several cities a considerable distance apart, we opted to focus on all that Sydney had to offer. (The Great Barrier Reef will have to wait another day!)

As it was, with such a variety of things to do and see, and so much history to enjoy, we later wished we could have

PLEASE SEE → **SYDNEY, F4**



Plan to spend at least a day at beautiful Bondi Beach, about seven kilometres from downtown Sydney. Relax, swim or learn to surf. Here, Sidney Donaldson catches a wave during a group surfing lesson. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Homes&Leisure

Ten things to do for an unforgettable trip to Australia's biggest city

SYDNEY → F1

extended our stay in New South Wales, the state that boasts Sydney as its capital.

Before arriving, I'd read that Aboriginal Australians were the area's first inhabitants, living around Sydney's bountiful, natural harbour for thousands of years as prosperous hunter-gatherers. In the late 18th century, the British began their colonization of the Australian continent from Sydney, using prisoners from overflowing jails in England as their pioneers. Over the next half century, New South Wales became a society of free men and women, some of whom discovered that the region was suited for the production of fine merino wool. Today, Sydney's solid economy has particular strength in finance, manufacturing and tourism. About 4.5 million 'Sydneyers' live in the city, considered one of the most multicultural in the world and arguably one of its most beautiful, due to both its harbour setting and the dozens of amazing beaches along its Pacific coastline.

Home base for most of our Australian adventure was the Crowne Plaza Coogee Beach. Just 15 minutes from Sydney's downtown in one of the city's eastern suburbs, the lovely property sits across the street from Coogee Beach. (Book a balcony room for panoramic ocean views, including gorgeous sunrises and sunsets.)

In addition to its beach proximity, well-appointed rooms, top-notch dining options (including tasty fresh seafood at its Bluesalt Restaurant), as well as other superior amenities, the hotel got top marks from our foursome for having some of the friendliest staff we'd ever encountered on our travels.

Our favourite was Gavin Curtis, the hotel's bubbly concierge who had endless energy for guests, even during the hectic Christmas season. From providing suggestions on coastal walks to giving the low-down on where to shop, he was one of a rare breed of folks completely passionate about their jobs, making our stay exceptional.

With Gavin's help and a ton of research before leaving home, we felt we'd experienced the best of Sydney, heading back to New Brunswick after our holiday with memories to last a lifetime.

Considering a trip to Sydney? Here are 10 suggestions for making it truly unforgettable:

1. Have a blast at Bondi Beach: Plan at least a day at Sydney's most famous beach, located about seven kilometres from downtown by public transport. (Buses and trains are an excellent way to get around Sydney, incidentally.) Laze on Bondi's pristine sands, splash in the waves or, better yet, take a surf lesson. Certified instructors with Let's Go Surfing in North Bondi had our family group riding the waves by the end of a two-hour lesson. For those less keen on the water, people-watching at Bondi is a sport in itself.

2. Walk on the wild side: Take the scenic cliff-top walk from Bondi Beach to Coogee Beach. The six-kilometre trek has incredible views as you travel past beaches, parks, cliffs, bays and rock pools. There are plenty of spots to rest, swim and eat along the way. Wear comfy shoes, a hat and bring water.

3. Climb the bridge (or at least watch someone do it): Opened in 1932, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is a world-renowned symbol of Australia. To understand its history and to witness one of the best vantage points in the city, do a Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb. While my hubby and I don't love heights and skipped it, our daughters raved about the views during their 3.5-hour climb to the bridge summit. Consider it for your bucket list.

4. Hike to Barrenjoey Lighthouse at Palm Beach: An outstanding day trip from Sydney is Palm Beach, one to two hours from the city centre, depending on traffic. (We rented a car, but bus connections are also available.) Once there,

hike to Barrenjoey Head, which looms over the beach's northern end. Atop the high jut of land, you'll find Barrenjoey Lighthouse, built in 1881 from sandstone quarried on site. You'll also catch unparalleled views of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Broken Bay and the Central Coast. Don't forget the camera!

5. Explore the Blue Mountains: Only 90 minutes from Sydney, the Blue Mountains area makes another terrific excursion. This expanse of rugged tablelands, sheer cliffs and deep valleys features more than 140 kilometres of trails. There are also many lookouts from which to see magnificent rock formations, waterfalls and hazy blue forests dominated by eucalyptus trees. (The blue hue is apparently from droplets of eucalyptus oil combining with dust particles and water vapour to scatter refracted rays of light, which are largely blue in colour.) Rent a car or take a train to reach this unique destination.

6. Make friends with a koala: On your way to or from the Blue Mountains, stop at Featherdale Wildlife Park in Doonside. Established on three hectares of land in 1953, Featherdale is considered one of the best privately owned wildlife parks in Australia. It's an awesome place to hand-feed a kangaroo, wallaby or emu, or enjoy a face-to-face encounter with one of the park's friendly koalas.

7. Meet more creatures at Taronga Zoo: Taronga Zoo is just 12 minutes from Sydney's downtown by ferry and is a must both for the ferry ride, with breathtaking views of Sydney Harbour, and the fantastic zoo experience. With more than 4,000 animals and a multitude of zookeeper talks and shows daily, it's a fun attraction for all ages. For super photos (and happy feet), take the Sky Safari cable car to the upper zoo entrance at the beginning of your visit and work your way downhill, an especially good idea on hot summer days.

8. Do downtown: We divided our Sydney vacation between the Crowne Plaza Coogee Beach and a downtown hotel, the Sydney Harbour Marriott at Circular Quay. The Marriott is a wonderful choice, situated close to many of the city's must-do spots like the iconic Opera House. Whether you take a walking or bus tour, sample the wide array of local eateries or browse the markets, boutiques and shopping centres. There's something for everyone in Sydney's downtown.

9. Ring in the New Year: New Year's Eve in Sydney is known as one of the world's most impressive events, mainly because of its famed fireworks set against Sydney Harbour. We timed our vacation to include New Year's and made it extra special by celebrating at NYE "Under the Stars" at the Royal Botanic Garden. While there are many places from which to see the fireworks, the event provides an ultimate venue — a hill overlooking the Harbour Bridge and Opera House where ticket holders join a limited crowd to stretch out on picnic blankets and enjoy the show (with food and drinks included through the evening.) Have a special birthday or anniversary coming up? Toast the New Year Sydney-style!

10. Take in an Aussie barbecue: Whether you know locals who extend an invite, join some new mates at one of the city's many park grills or opt for restaurant fare, don't leave Oz without experiencing an Aussie barbecue. Australians are serious about their "barbies," with lamb, sausages and prawns (shrimp) being among the prime grilling picks. While not completely unlike the Canadian tradition, the Aussie barbecue seems more of a major cultural affair. There are definite similarities in how both nations enjoy their grill results, however — with one (or more ...) bottles of cold beer and/or delicious wine.

Cathy Donaldson
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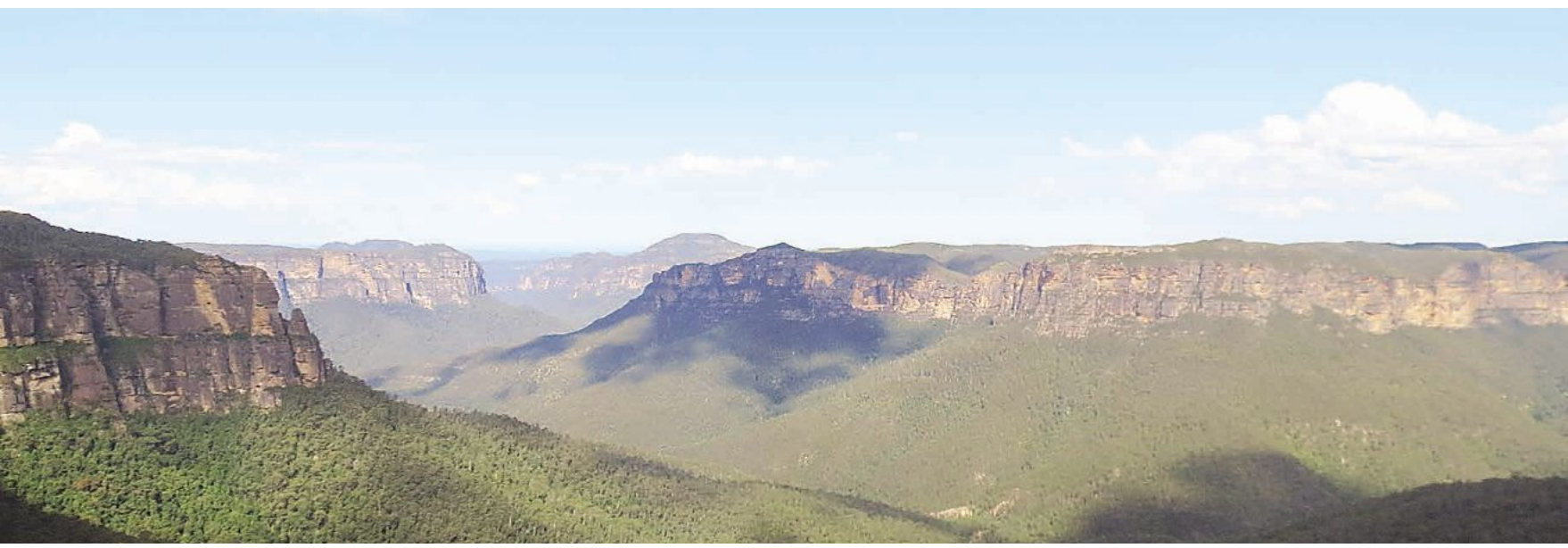
For the adventurous traveller, consider a Sydney Harbour BridgeClimb. Here, Sarah Donaldson, left, and Sidney Donaldson are photographed during a three-hour climb of the bridge, which opened in 1932. PHOTO: SUBMITTED



The six-kilometre scenic walk from Bondi Beach to Coogee Beach is a must when exploring Sydney. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



Take a day trip to Palm Beach from Sydney, combined with a hike to Barrenjoey Head. During the latter, you'll be privy to some unparalleled views of the region. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



The Blue Mountains area — about 90 minutes from Sydney — features rugged tablelands, sheer cliffs and deep valleys with forests dominated by eucalyptus trees. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Answer from page F2

New York Times Crossword

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