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Sunrise across Jervis Bay

Time to explore our own backyard

by Nigel Bowen

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With Australia's boom finally running out of puff and the dollar weakening, it's time for Aussies to rethink the traditional overseas holiday.

Over the Christmas holidays I spent a lovely week in Jervis Bay, on NSW's South Coast. There's nothing notable about that apart from the fact it was the first holiday I'd taken in my own country in more than a decade.

Over the past 10 years I've been to the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Bali, Thailand, New York, Hawaii, Fiji, Singapore, Malaysia, Borneo, Shanghai and Mauritius.

Up until relatively recently, that kind of travelling history would probably be something only the idle rich could boast about but I managed it while earning a journalist's salary. In an era where there's been relatively low employment, steadily rising wages and a dollar that has, for long periods, outmuscled the greenback, heading overseas has made perfect sense, especially for cosmopolitan and adventurous Gen Ys. Why holiday in your own country when you can experience an exotic foreign one? Why go to Surfers Paradise when, for the same or less money, you can live in the lap of five-star luxury in Seminyak?

I don't regret having explored the world while the conditions were well suited to doing so but neither am I entirely disappointed that the overseas travel boom is subsiding as the economy slows and the dollar weakens.

Local wonders

I might have seen a lot of the world but I've never walked around Uluru, swum with the dolphins in Monkey Mia, gone cage diving with sharks in Port Lincoln, visited Hobart's Museum of Old & New Art, attended a Melbourne Cup, chowed down on bush tucker in Arnhem Land, trudged through a Coober Pedy opal mine, driven down the Great Ocean Road or gotten tipsy doing a cellar door coach trip of the Barossa Valley. In short, bewitched by the opportunity to explore the world I've long ignored my own magnificent backyard.

Tourist drawcard

Ironically, it's a backyard that those from many of the countries I've been visiting will go to great effort and expense to reach. Now, sure, there's an element of the grass always being greener but the fact is the rest of the world regards Australia as a magical holiday destination while we ungrateful Aussies tend to take its many wonders for granted.

Island paradise

Seeing so many French tourists in Jervis Bay reminded me of just how good we've got it. Those French citizens had travelled 20-plus hours and spent thousands of euros to experience a coastal wonderland that I could access with no greater investment needed than a couple of hours and a tank of petrol. What's more, I didn't have to muck around with booking flights, making sure my passport was valid, changing currency or learning the basics of another language before being able to enjoy my holiday.

Home sweet home

No doubt I'll still go on the occasional trip overseas but I'm now keen to experience more of my homeland. And if that gives me a deeper appreciation of what it means to be an Aussie and provides some support to our beleaguered local tourism industry then it's worth the sacrifice of failing to visit some countries I otherwise might have.

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