

# Adventures in Australia



"I didn't know Australia had a rainforest," was a popular response when I declared that I would be studying abroad in Australia for a month this summer. I was in total agreement with that statement; I didn't know Australia had rainforests either. In fact, there were a lot of things that I

would soon discover during my month-long stay in the Wet Tropics of Northern Queensland, Australia.

For me, the trip started when I got my ticket at the CVG airport; I had never been on an airplane nor been further west than Chicago, which was years ago. When I finally touched down in Cairns and got off the plane, the first thing that got my attention was the sun! Talk about a high UV index. I then met the group of 19 students I would be living with for the rest of the month, and we proceeded to drive (on the left side of the road) up the winding Gillies Highway – take your Dramamine – to the Centre where we would live and learn about birds, pitfall traps, plants and climate change.

The Centre was off the winding Gillies Highway by way of an even more adventurous access road. Everyone slept in cabins on the property, all meals were eaten outside and the very limited internet access prevented technology from becoming a huge distraction. I made many great friends and memories during that month —

workout club at 5:30 a.m., many games of banana-grams, Marianne's cooking and the Wompoo bird calling in the afternoon. Many other wonders we saw were golden-orb



spiders, platypus, cassowaries, terrestrial leeches, crocodiles, bandicoots, pythons, tree kangaroos and plant diversity like you wouldn't believe.



There was never a great culture shock moment. Some things different from the U.S. were the double flush toilets, a large backpacker community, the high UV index, and the corn was switched out for sorghum and bananas! But, there were many firsts for me like staying in a hostel, sea-kayaking, and snorkeling — which was

in the Great Barrier Reef with sea turtles, corals and beautiful fish!

Australia has a very environmental-friendly feel to it. Rainforest restorations are taking place, platypus sightings are tracked and an initiative to track bleaching events in the Great Barrier Reef is in place. We learned how important the rainforest is for biodiversity and

resources as well as how changes in climate patterns are negatively affecting the wet and dry season regimes. Needless to say, Australia captured my heart. I would go back in an instant. It is a wondrous place that is not out to kill you, despite having the world's most venomous snakes. So go ahead, take the plunge into another country, There are great things to be discovered at the edge of the unknown!

