

ANZ Travel Insights

With no desire to travel outside the local confines of Malleswaram, Bangalore my residential area, a jam-packed tour of 31 days, between February 17 to March 17 2024, to Australia and New Zealand was to say the least beyond hectic, adventurous and exciting. Covering twelve cities/towns, using road, rail, air and waterways, we also explored Skywalk, Bridge Climb, Gondola rides, Putting, Cable cars and a dozen treks across hills, coasts and meadows to add more thrills. What made the journey more endearing was the company of my spouse and our four friends who were like spice adding the special flavour to my memories.



Over the next few days, I plan to share some insights of my experience. Happy to share anything specific of our travels that you would like me to cover.

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1. ANZ Travel Insights: The Whys of Holidays

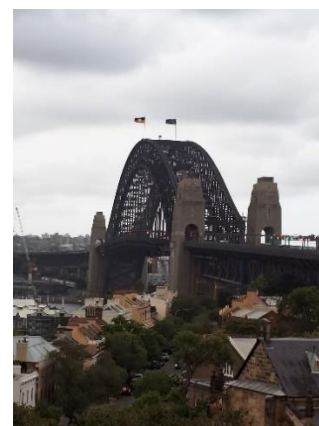


Everyone one has a trigger for their travel. Some travel to get away from their hectic work-life, while others travel to fulfil their sense of adventure and enjoy new experiences. Some others travel to witness world-renowned monuments and tick it off their bucket list and many others travel to experience new cultures and cities. My trigger was a bit different, not a keen travel enthusiast, my primary motive was to keep my spouse happy and spend quality time with her.

While our travel had a dash of adventure, sight-seeing, and the obligatory contribution to the local economy, I am not sure if it would meet the definition of a relaxing or rejuvenating holiday. Sight-seeing and shopping not being of interest to me, I began the vacation with apprehension. However, to my surprise, I am happy to say that the overall experience coupled with the adventure-oriented itinerary that is unique to ANZ locales was enjoyable.

We started our journey on a Saturday evening from Bangalore to Brisbane, via a connecting flight in Sydney. While three hours seemed like adequate time for immigration and custom clearance and transfer, undue anxiety crept in due to a 15-minute flight delay, an hour long wait for immigration and custom clearance, most of it for collecting our baggage. The quick transfer bus from international to domestic terminal calmed our anxious nerves as we boarded our flight from Sydney to Brisbane in time.

POINT TO PONDER: SHOULD WE CONSIDER THE AIRLINE LUGGAGE WEIGHT LIMIT PRESCRIBED AS THE MINIMUM OR A MAXIMUM?



2. ANZ Travel Insights: The First Trek and A Lot to Learn



After being diagnosed with diabetes eight years ago, I have always walked with my footwear even at home. I was pleasantly surprised when my nephew who is based in Brisbane decided to walk bare foot on our 3 KM downhill climb to Purling Brooks fall. During this three hours climbdown through thick vegetation with almost complete tree cover, I realised that our path was fully covered with leaves and the moisture in the air made the pathway quite soft to tread. Used to thorns and stones in Indian treks, I was surprised to find none. This infused the confidence in me as on our way back, I too decided to remove my shoes and walk barefoot, much to the discomfort of my better-half who kept reminding me that any foot wound would take a long time for it to heal. I reached the top unhurt, thanks to the powers that protect me, feeling a sense of pride in knowing that I had walked barefoot on a three KM forest trail. I think a lot of the credit for this goes to the culture there, where litter free and clean pathways is the norm.

Further, the entire pathway has thoughtfully designed resting places at frequent intervals with water fountains to quench your thirst.

A live rugby match, a five-hour downhill trek to a waterfall, visit to the nearby attractions: Gold Coast, Byron Bay and a Koala sanctuary, topping a couple of days spent exploring the Central Business District was the week well spent in Brisbane, a city with hot climate suitable for an Indian landing in Australia.

POINT TO PONDER: DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO TRAVEL TO MULTIPLE CITIES OR STAY PUT IN A CITY AND EXPLORE ITS MULTIPLE FACETS.



3. ANZ Travel Insights: A Rugby Match to Remember



A keen armchair enthusiast who enjoys watching sports on TV, my aversion to watching sports live is due to the horror stories I hear from Indian fans who go to these events. The horrors experienced by those attending the recent cricket world cup finals in Ahmedabad only added to my nightmares. But hearing a lot about the Australian sporting culture, the offer to attend a live rugby match in Brisbane was one I could not refuse. While the event itself was quite the spectacle expected, on my way back, I marvelled at their organisational and planning skills; the free bus rides to and from the stadium to eliminate traffic jams, spacious and well-lit passages to the stadium from bus stand making it family friendly. With clean toilets and a food court packed into the 52,000-seater stadium, the entire experience was both convenient and enjoyable. I hope that day is not far-off when we too, in India have similar experiences.

Our travel to the match was a short drive to the nearest bus terminus, with adequate provision to park our car. Special buses organised to the stadium at predefined intervals carried us to the venue. The bus terminal to the stadium walk was through well-lit broad walkways. Immediately after the match we retraced the path back. After this experience, there is no rationale for using private transport considering all aspects of comfort, timeliness or cost.



POINT TO PONDER: SHOULD NOT THE HIGH-PRICED TICKETS FOR SPORT EVENTS ENSURE GOOD IN-STADIUM AND AROUND STADIUM EXPERIENCE?

4. ANZ Travel Insights: Mild, Medium or Hot



Looking with awe at diners in Andhra restaurants who opted for hot when offered the choice between hot and medium preparations, I did not have the courage to try it even once till my recent travel. After a couple of days of bland food on our travel, when we visited an Indian restaurant, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself opting for hot, when offered the choice between mildly spiced, medium or hot, only to realise hot is hot anywhere in the world as we quickly asked for curds, and got yogurt in return to cool us.

They say an army marches on its

stomach and any Indian travelling overseas will agree that we can extend this to the tourist too. Our breakfast during this travel was more English with pastries, cereals and fruits, the lunch based on availability was either Mexican or Burgers, and the dinner was invariably in an Indian restaurant. While Indian food is available almost everywhere, the menu is North Indian and those looking for idly and dosas will be disappointed unless you are in a large city.



POINT TO PONDER: IS CULTIVATING A TASTE FOR DIFFERENT CUSINES A PREREQUISITE FOR AN ENJOYABLE FOREIGN TRAVEL?

5. ANZ Travel Insights: Variety is the Spice ...



Tram, ferry, punting, boats, suburban trains, buses and to complete the list private taxi rides using Uber were our commute modes during this travel. In addition, for some adventure trips we rode on gondolas, submarine, cable cars, zipline, amphibian vehicle, Hagglund all-terrain vehicle used for Antarctic exploration and vertical train rides. A helicopter ride scheduled for a glacier walk was cancelled due to bad weather. On reflection, I think we missed out only on hovercraft and spacecraft in using all known methods of transport.

Commute in Brisbane, or for that matter most Australian cities is user friendly with multiple public transport options of sub-urban trains, trams, bus and ferries. This is in addition to private transport providers like Uber for those in a hurry. To use public transport, a smart card costing \$10 is needed in addition to the fare that needs to be loaded into the smart card. For tourists with short stay in the city, this can be expensive. Hence, this can be a profitable business opportunity for hotels and convenience stores to rent smart cards required for local commute which will be tourist friendly. Google maps combined with the smart card for local commute will make the tourist mobile to explore the cities to their heart's content.



POINT TO PONDER: FOR THE METRO COMMUTER IN INDIA, URBAN COMMUTE IN AUSTRALIA IS NO STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

6. ANZ Travel Insights: Behind the Wheels, with A Navigator



Like most travellers to New Zealand, we too decided to hire a car and drive through the scenic landscapes. Being prudent, we registered two drivers for each of the two cars we hired to have a standby driver for contingencies. As a standby driver, on the second day I tried out a short ride back to the hotel and I enjoyed it so much that I continued to drive for the rest of our journey covering over 1300 KMs. With our initially designated driver as my navigator, our drive concluded safely, but not without a memorable incident.

Failing to come to a complete stop at an intersection within the city, a police car behind me blared their siren asking me to pull over and stop. Despite it being 7.30 in the morning, the lady cop tested my breath for alcohol by making me blow into the breath analyser by counting one to five, after confirming I was sober, she scanned a copy of my driving license to ascertain I was the registered driver and let me continue driving with a warning to follow all road rules. These few tense moments had all the passengers in our car hold their breath not knowing what the penalty was, only to laugh about it as we drove on after being warned.



While driving in New Zealand is the same as in India, two factors make it very different, one the speed limit that change frequently from a high of 100 KM on highways to a low of 10 KM across single track bridges, and the second of clearly marked lanes of white and yellow lines, defined spots for taking a left or right turn and with signage for complete halt. Through initially cumbersome, it soon became a valuable aid to drive.

POINTS TO PONDER: INDIAN DRIVING LICENSE IS VALID IN ANZ FOR A PERIOD OF 6 MONTHS FROM THE DATE OF ARRIVAL INTO THE COUNTRY.

7. ANZ Travel Insights: All Treks Are Not the Same



With vast meadows, long coast lines and rugged mountains, ANZ is a trekkers delight. Natural beauty is enhanced by thoughtful human additions of well-defined pathways with signages, clean toilets and water fountains to make trekking a joyful and exciting experiences. For the more adventurous, excitement is for the taking, prominent among them being the Sydney Bridge Climb, Auckland Skywalk and the Franz Josep

Glazier walk. Despite being tempted, realising I was a senior citizen I did not dare to try bungee jumping or its milder version Skydive. We walked an average of 10+ KM every day in rugged terrain to returned 2 Kgs lighter, despite a calorie rich diet. What an enjoyable way to lose weight!

Guided treks for Sydney Bridge Climb and Auckland Skywalk were a learning experience for anyone planning such events elsewhere. Well trained personnel took us through safety briefings, showed us videos of such walks to rest tense minds attempting this and the use of safety equipment provided comfort not only for the participants but also their accompanying well-wishers.



POINT TO PONDER: PREREQUISITE FOR ANZ TRAVEL, ESPECIALLY THE TREKKERS APPROACHING WINTER IS APPROPRIATE CLOTHING ESPECIALLY CAPS, SCARFS, JACKETS AND SHOES FOR YOUR CHOSEN TERRAIN.

8. ANZ Travel Insights: Trans Alpine Train Journey

It was a train journey with a difference. The four-hour travel between Greymouth and Christchurch or the Tasmanian Sea to the Pacific Ocean cutting across the Southern Island, West to East, was an experience to cherish. In train carriages with large windows and an open carriage at the end of the train for viewing, we had location-based commentary available to us on the head phones provided giving us a view of what an expert would see, along with the history and anecdotes of that place. Thoughtfully the train had a dedicated carriage for luggage which the passenger had to check in like in an airline to make the journey more enjoyable. An experience worth the time and cost, especially for those who have not driven through the countryside in New Zealand to get a view of the picturesque landscapes of New Zealand.



While there was a lot to admire in this Trans Alpine train journey, the variety and freshly cooked food served in Indian trains is unmatched, which is in addition to the packaged food available like biscuits, chips, pastries and ice cream. Further, it is served in India at your seat, in contrast to the passenger required to go to the catering car for getting their refreshments in this journey.

POINT TO PONDER: A TRAIN JOURNEY OUTSIDE INDIA IS WORTH THE EXPERIENCE, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THE COOLER WEATHER AND VARIED COUNTRYSIDE VIEW WE GET TO SEE.

9. ANZ Travel Insights: Friends, Relatives and Hotels



Indian families are now truly global and most of us have a relative staying in most desirable tourist destinations. The spread of IT and financial services industry has ensured that we have our friends too located across the world. On travel, especially foreign travel, staying or spending time with friends and relatives is both an enjoyable experience as we reconnect and relive our experiences, but also induces a sense of guilt of having imposed ourselves on them. While there are no rules, I believe a lunch or dinner or at a max a day with a friend balances out the joy vs the guilt feeling, and with close relatives, it could be a couple of days.

We spent a week with our sister-in-law, nephew and his family in Brisbane to enjoy the comfort of home life and Indian food, and a guided tour of Brisbane planned with meticulous care considering my specific interest, especially in sports. In Melbourne, we were the recipient of our friend's hospitality with a sumptuous lunch and an afternoon of chit-chat taking us back a couple of decades down the memory lane. Cherish the lovely time spent with them.



POINT TO PONDER: JUDICIOUS BLEND OF STAY WITH FRIENDS, RELATIVES AND HOTEL ENRICH THE ENTIRE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE.

10. ANZ Travel Insights: The Long and Short of It

There is no one size fits all, however there are some common factors that influence the duration of an ideal holiday like destination, travel time and cost. Short trips of one to three days, planned for a long weekend looks ideal for short drives of around five hours. A week looks good for travel to a nearby country as there is a need to leverage the longer travel time and cost. But for travel across oceans, could ten days or two weeks be ideal? Our trip which lasted 31 days was definitely on the higher side as towards the end, we were longing for home comfort and getting back to our normal routines reinforcing my belief that more than a fortnight was a travel too long for any destination.



Travel during student and working life is limited by external factors like the prudence of staying away from school or work. For the retired age group, especially the one without daily family commitments, travel duration is a pure play of optimising the travel experience and hence could serve as a guide for the other age groups too.

POINT TO PONDER: IS THE FEAR OF NOT BEING ABLE TO RETURN MAKE US WANT TO COVER MORE IN FOREIGN TRAVEL RESULTING IN LONGER DURATION AND WIDER COVERAGE AS OPPOSED TO DEEPER COVERAGE?