AUSSIE! AUSSIE! AUSSIE! OI! OI! OI!

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So I’m at my first Newcastle Knights footy game (rugby) and some bloke yells out “AUSSIE, AUSSIE, AUSSIE.” Next thing I know every person in hearing range responds in unison “OI, OI, OI.” Then back to the Aussie guy, and then back to the Oi’ers. They go back and forth until the entire stadium has been taken in by the chant. I had just been introduced to the very popular, often used for no apparent reason, country chant.

Last semester, fall of 2000, I journeyed to the land down under as an exchange student at the University of Newcastle, which is just north of Sydney about 100 miles. There’s no way I can explain how incredibly awesome those six months were. I’m going to try to give a glimpse of my experiences down under in this article in hopes that it will tempt you to take the 16,000 mile plane flight to Australia to meet these people and, see this country, that has forever changed my outlook on life.

Australians live by the three B’s, beaches, beer, and BBQ. Going to the beach is a regular part of Australian life. Nearly every day someone in Evatt (the best dorm in the world) was taking a carload of people to the beach. With surfboards tied to the top, we would cram so many people in the little Aussie cars that usually one if not two people would ride in the boot (trunk). Surfing is so much harder than it looks and the waves can get pretty brutal. As for the sharks, there were...
three White Pointer (Great White) attacks when I was in Oz (Australia) but they were all on the southern coast where the water temperature remains cool.

If you go to a pub down under DO NOT order a Foster. The bartender will only smile and think to himself, dumb Yank. It's a schooner (glass) of Tooyies New that you want. Australians take pride in their beer and think it's the best in the world. I would have to admit it's very good, much better then the stuff we have on tap around here. But if you do get the urge for the king of beers it will cost you about $65 au. for a crate (case) of Bud.

The Great Aussie BBQ was one of the most enjoyable events I would partake in at least once if not four to five times in a week. Much like their beer Australians think they have the best beef in the world. I never had the heart to tell them that nothing could top Iowa prime rib, from a corn fed Black Angus. The BBQ gathering wasn't really about the food but rather it was a social time for everyone to kick back, relax and just have a yawn (chat). These were the best times! Family and friends would talk and laugh for hours with no worries in the world. I think this is why families and friends in Australia are so close and live to spend time together. They just don't ever let life's little things get them down and if by chance someone's having troubles in their life they will for sure be taken care of at the next BBQ gathering.

When it comes to school and working, the Aussies really have it made. Nothing in the country ever starts before 9:00 AM and everyone is usually done with work or school by 4 or 5:00 PM. I only had class three days a week for about 10 hours total. Very little homework is assigned and usually only one test or paper per class and you only take three or four classes a semester. Each class is worth four credits and everyone graduates in three years. You have an entire month to prepare your final essays or take your exams. In the six months I was in Oz I was in class for 11 weeks, the rest of the time we were on one of the many public holidays including a 30-day break for the Olympics. If you are a working individual, you will enjoy a minimum of four weeks a year paid vacation plus public holidays and sick time. I never met an Aussie that was too busy with work or school that they couldn't drop everything to relax for a Bar-B and a beer.

During my stay abroad I had some amazing experiences. The hanging out with Dan Gable, Lincoln McIlravy, and the Bran's brothers at the wrestling finals during the 2000 Sydney Olympics was one of my top memories. I also made it to track and field events as well as the biggest party on earth, Sydney harbor.
Great Ocean Road, The Seven Apostles.

for the eve of closing ceremonies. One and a half million Olympic enthused people packed the opera house stairs and surrounding the Sydney Harbor Bridge for the beginning of the celebration. I can’t explain the electricity in the atmosphere. The most incredible fireworks display I have ever seen in my life went on for 20 minutes. An F-111 flew over Stadium Australia (the main Olympic stadium which held 115,000 people) and the harbor with a 30-foot flame streaming from the rear jet. This symbolized the Olympic flame leaving Sydney and returning to Athens Greece home of the first Olympics. The breathtaking fireworks display came to an end with the spectacular explosion of the enormous Olympic rings on the Sydney Harbor Bridge. The cheers from the sea of partiers quickly turned to singing and dancing in the streets, which went on hours after the sun came up the next morning.

As my mates and I walked to a train station the next morning I began to think about how much the Olympics meant to the Australians. The people of Australia loved the athletes and the spectators immensely and with no reservations. The Olympics were a gift from Australia to the people of the world. In the end the retiring president of the international Olympic committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, stated that the 2000 Sydney Olympics were the “Best Olympics ever,” the country went absolutely crazy.

Some other memorable experiences of the trip were diving in the Great Barrier Reef, viewing the huge gum trees of Tasmania, feral pig hunting in the bush, going to a show at the Opera House, bungy jumping the world's highest jump (442 feet/8 second free fall), getting lost on my dirt bike in the isolated mountains of Fiji, and visiting one of the most beautiful countries in the world, New Zealand.

My trip abroad was an amazing eye opening experience. Sometimes during the rush of life in the US people lose sight of what is really important, family and friends. I heard this saying while abroad; Australians work to live, Americans live to work. Most of the people in Oz live in a nice modest size house and drive a small economical car. They spend the rest of their earnings on the 3 B’s or whatever else brings them and family and friends happiness. They truly live by the popular Australian saying “No worries”. I would like to end with a quote from a famous Australian photographer Ken Dunken. After returning from Oz I have made a promise to myself to live by these words; “Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.”
Matt, his parents and a buddy had the opportunity to hike on a glacier.
More of Matt’s Aussie Pics...

Matt next to a gum tree.

Gum wood at a lumber mill.
Milford Sound, one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Matt and his friends waiting outside the Sydney 2000 Olympics.
Matt got a quick picture of "Golden Shoes" at the Olympic Track.

Matt hopped down on the Olympic track field before he got caught.
These are some of the Olympic Swimmers at Sydney.

This is Matt and a few friends waiting for the Olympic Torch to arrive in Sydney.