



# Life-Long Friends Traveling the Australian Outback

by TAMRA HYSTER

**W**hat happens when life-long friends who grew up in the small village of Kiryat Tivon, Israel, reunite in Australia? They pack light and jump into a Cirrus SR22T to go wherever the weather and their adventurous sides take them.

This group of very close friends first met at preschool, all of them were the first generation of Israeli parents who either survived the Holocaust or were deeply affected by it. Most of them did not have grandparents to mentor them and their parents were dealing with their own post-war trauma. This drew the boys to form their own tight-knit family to support each other, work through the highs and lows of growing up, attending school, and dealing with life in a conflicted, hostile community.

Over the years, the friends were split up; attending different schools, and reunited when they could. They went into the army, as all Israelis do, and worked in different fields, but always kept in touch. One of them, Boaz, met a Finnish woman and moved to build a life and family in Finland. Another, Amir, moved to Australia and Sharon stayed and still lives in the same village of Tivon. There were four friends in the life-long unit, but Doron was unable to make this get-together, so his brother-in-law, Roni, came to form the group of four very interesting diverse men traveling the great Aussie Outback.



*A view of the winding Flinders River, Gulf of Carpentaria, in North Queensland.*

The trip started from Bankstown, heading northeast around the busiest airspace of Australia's airport to the very populated Gold Coast. Two hours of flight at 9,000 feet encapsulated the most picturesque Hawkesbury River running through the small mountain range in the perfect weather of the Central Coast region. A GPS RNAV approach to runway 32 allowed for following the magnificent coastline and a night view of the tall buildings of the Gold Coast. Once on the ground, they adjusted to the slow and easy pace of the Australian way of life. Although they were all fluent in English, it was hard to understand the local Queenslander's fast-paced accent. A couple of days at the Gold Coast allowed the group to enjoy the great weather and nightlife of the region.

They departed the Gold Coast, flying north along the shoreline and received clearance to fly over Brisbane Airport en route to Hervey Bay. They then requested and received a clearance from ATC to divert to and fly at 1,000 feet over Fraser Island, considered the biggest sand island in the world. The white sand on the island has accumulated in the last 750,000 years from 800 miles away in the Northern Rivers and "transported" north by

longshore drift. The pristine blue lakes on Fraser Island qualify it to be listed on the UNESCO heritage list. The group landed and stayed in Hervey and took a four-wheel drive to Fraser Island. Driving on the roughest roads through rainforests, mangrove and swamps, they had a chance to swim in some of the purest lake waters on earth.

The group's next flight was to Mackay – the sugar capital of Australia and the starting point of The Great Barrier Reef. Their host for a few nights, the very kind John Cowley, looked after them in his Mackay Grande Suites Hotel. They travelled around Mackay for two days with its magnificent long, golden sand beaches, excellent food and night life. Unfortunately, they could not swim due to the presence of the Box Jellyfish, the world's most venomous creature, it can lead to human death in as quickly as two minutes and is known to take several unsuspecting tourists every year.

John offered his Hamilton Island villa to the group, so that was their next destination! It is the largest inhabited island of the Whitsunday Islands, and a short 20-minute flight from Mackay. Landing on runway 14 at Hamilton positioned them at a very low level above the reef and the spectacular coral.

Hamilton Island is also the site that Steve Maltby (our mentor on the World Mission trip) pulled the parachute of his Cirrus SR22 and ditched into the ocean when his engine failed after take-off. The large fire rescue crew based on Hamilton could not reach the ditched Cirrus because their boat's engine would not start. Steve was eventually rescued by a fisherman on a yacht. The Island keeps several rescue teams, but the only time in 15 years that they were needed they failed to accomplish the rescue. John's "villa" turned out to be more like a palace; the guys felt like movie stars driving around the island in electric golf carts (an Island policy), swimming and snorkelling, taking boat rides and just resting and eating well for a week – what a great place.

The group decided it was time to move on to more rugged areas, departing Hamilton Island at midday with 25-knot winds. Sharon was very concerned about the winds prior to the departure, but to his surprise there was no turbulence; the Cirrus with its high wing loading just cut through the air in the slickest way.

Routing directly to Karumba, located on the Gulf of Carpentaria, they passed Townsville and then nothing for 500 km. Boaz was very surprised how monotonous the view was and dull in comparison with the Whitsundays. During some of the flight, the radio was silent – not even Brisbane centre could be heard – although they monitored on the ADS-B all the way. According to Boaz, the landing at Karumba was like "closing down the distance to the ground with a gentle kiss to the runway."

Karumba is on Savannah Way, a 3,700 km road that is known for its four-foot, 15-pound Brolga, also known as the Australian Crane, with hundreds sitting on the runway, then spreading like the Red Sea when the plane landed. The Savannah Way has fantastic landscapes that cover



just under one million square miles of the Savannah, with less than 50,000 people living in the vast area. Can you imagine so few people in an area that could cover Texas, California, Montana, New Mexico and Arizona?

The friends experienced fantastic fishing with KerryD Fishing Expeditions and the local chef at the pub/hotel cooked it to perfection. Amir had a scary encounter on his way back to the hotel that night with a Coastal Taipan, the third-most venomous land snake in the world, having a 100 percent mortality rate if not treated within a few minutes. Luckily Amir spotted the aggressive snake and gave it the respect of distance.

With the weather showing a huge “H” all through Australia, it was possible to fly Karumba to Darwin non-stop as long as the departing time was early – Northern Australia is known for its dust devils and harsh flying conditions. The whole flight is designated “extremely remote;” requiring careful fuel management and emergency equipment.



*Sharon crushing his thirst (with photo play) at Wangi Falls.*

Flying at 1,000 feet along the coast and enjoying magnificent views of the network of rivers that feed into the Gulf; Roni was amazed that despite the heat, the airplane was very stable. Crossing from Queensland to the Northern Territory there was about 45 minutes of complete radio silence; common in remote Australia, so the SR22T is equipped with a satellite phone.

Conducting a STAR arrival into Darwin provided a great aerial view of the city. The group would spend four days driving, starting with Kakadu National Park. Larger than Rhode Island, it is a World Heritage Park known for its biodiverse wetlands, rivers, sandstone escarpments and large plant species, wildlife and salt-water crocodiles. They stayed at the Crocodile Hotel, a lovely place in the middle of nature where the nearest town is over 150 miles away.

The next day, they continued to Katherine Gorge, a series of 13 gorges with rapids and falls that are a must-see; you can see the park through its well-developed land trails and explore the gorges by small boat. They finished the Northern Territory leg of the trip at Lichtfield Park trekking through one of the park’s bushwalks, followed by a cool swim in Florence Falls and Buley Rockhole, which must be as close as it gets to the Garden of Eden.

Next, they headed to Western Australia and the best destination of the journey, Kununurra, the gateway to Kimberley National Park and regarded as one of the last remaining wilderness areas on earth. It is home to some truly extraordinary natural attractions, and provides visitors with the consummate Australian Outback experience amidst a spectacular landscape.

Wild, pristine rivers crisscross the landscape – a magnet for anglers chasing the legendary barramundi, or for wildlife enthusiasts looking to see the stunning array of flora and fauna that proliferate in the region. You can spend weeks in the park that is made up of a combination of eight magnificent, and untouched wild areas such as Tunnel Creek National Park, Mitchell River National Park or Drysdale River National Park. It is so remote that there are no public access roads, no visitor facilities and no marked walking trails. This is a magnificent wilderness area. It is possible to visit, but it is certainly not for the average tourist. Upon landing, they took a powerful four-wheel-drive to get to their destination on one of the toughest roads in Australia. On the way they encountered a 500-foot wide river crossing. To check to see how deep the murky water was, they sent Roni to walk across the river; it was only two-feet deep so there was no issue for the four-wheel drive. They later found out that the river was one of the most crocodile infested in Australia!

About 100 miles from Kununurra, they arrived at their destination, Home Valley Station, also known as HV8 station. Its landscape offered outstanding scenic diversity; from rugged sandstone ranges and broad tidal flats, to rainforest pockets, gorges and permanent waterfalls – a ▶

*Friends (L to R) Amir, Sharon, Ron and Boaz in a gorge at Home Valley Station of West Australia.*





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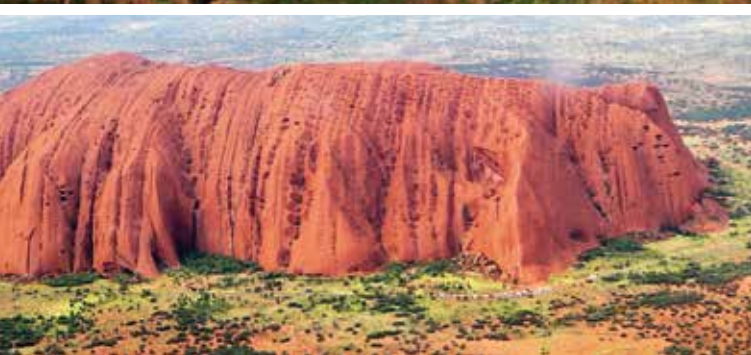
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unique place with a sense of adventure at every turn. They received a warm welcome organised by Lynn Stollery, the Station's general manager who provided a much needed cold drink. They then headed for a station tour – the station is a working ranch and is the size of a small country; six months of the year it is only accessible by air and though it has an airstrip that can easily accommodate a Cessna or Australia Post's King Air B200, it would not be suitable for a Cirrus. There are plans to upgrade the airstrip, so it is advisable to contact Home Valley Station when planning a trip to the area. Alfie, their tour guide, took them to see some of the highlights of the area that included swimming in water falls and vintage scenic spots. He also told them that the Station was featured in the movie "Australia" as the fictional Faraway Farm.

Alfie is part of the Station's indigenous training program and he was fantastic, very informative and anxious to please. They took a fishing trip on the river, where their engine died and with it, all communications back to base for help. They drifted dangerously into the rocks on the riverbanks and facing a real threat from the huge crocodiles in the river, immediate action was needed. This is where lifetime friends and army veterans came together; a quick mutiny, the skipper was removed and Amir took command steering the boat using its dead engine as a rudder. Boaz and Sharon used the paddle on one side and Roni and Aaron (the skipper) on the other for over one-and-a-half hours, rowing in 100-degree heat in the crocodile-infested river to get them back to base. What an adventure! Not really the kind they had imagined as they didn't even catch any fish!

On the last day, the group travelled to Emma Gorge; hidden within the fiery red of Cockburn Ranges. It is part of the El Questro Wilderness Park that boasts four major river systems from fresh water springs to the lazy salt water estuaries where an abundance of animals, fish and bird life congregate near waterholes and rivers. El Questro also has the only





Top, the Bungle Bungle Range, a World Heritage Site, located at East Kimberley, West Australia. Below, a close-up view of Ayers Rock, located in the Northern Territory.

five-star resort in the Kimberley region with a reasonable airstrip. After a long walk between the mountains, they arrived at a large waterhole for a well-earned swim.

On departure from Western Australia's East Kimberley Regional Airport back to Ayers Rock in the Northern Territory, they flew over the Bungle Bungles National Park with its famous 600-foot-high sandstone domes.

The sunset upon arrival at Ayers Rock allowed for a not-to-be-missed scenic flight. With radio clearance, they descended to 2,000 feet AGL and joined the pattern of tourist flights flying around this large 1,142-foot-high, six-mile circumference sandstone formation, now named "Uluru." The circuit route continues to a short 13-nm flight to circle The Olgas, a group of 36 large domed rock formations rising to over 1,700 feet. Due to the close proximity of sand dunes alongside the runway at the northern end, hazardous conditions exist for light aircraft when landing on runway 13 with an eastern crosswind. Wind shear in both speed and direction also exist and dust devils are prevalent throughout the year. To minimise the hazard, they aimed to achieve touchdown beyond 800 meters from the threshold – it was fun.

They stayed only one night at Ayers Rock Resort, which is the only accommodation within 250 miles and takes advantage by charging huge prices for a very average hotel and service. There are better accommodations in Alice Springs, some 200 nm away.

Visiting both Ayers Rock "Uluru" and The Olgas was impressive. They departed to Coober Pedy, the



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*The Salt Lakes north of Uluru Northern Territory.*

gem-quality opal capital of the world, famous for its below ground residence, also known as “dugouts” due to the extreme high summer heat of the area. A flight over the hundreds of “holes” that form opal mines followed by a pass over of William Creek, both in South Australia. After take-off, Boaz commented on how Sharon said before every flight he gets butterflies in his stomach, not so much from the actual flight but excitement from what will be the next adventure they will experience. Boaz, on the other hand, just enjoyed the fast powerful acceleration of the plane during take-off, being able to watch the rivers enter the sea and disappearing in a dance of colours and amazing shapes.

William Creek is located 110 miles from the nearest neighbouring town of Coober Pedy, and sits in the centre of the world’s biggest cattle station; Anna Creek Station. The settlement is about mid-point on the rugged Oodnadatta Track, a famous,

400-mile unsealed road, and the closest airstrip to Lake Eyre North; an ideal base for flights that are conducted year-round over Lake Eyre and the Anna Creek Painted Hills.

William Creek is the smallest settlement in South Australia with a permanent population of six humans and a dog. Trevor Wright owns it; a businessman who decided about 10 years ago that big cities and high-stress executive jobs were not for him because what he really liked to do was fly. He bought the small scenic flight operation at William Creek and made it into a giant business with over 40 planes, including a Cessna 210, a GippsAero GA8 Airvan and even an Aerostar 610P that are scattered in national parks all over South Australia and Queensland.

In the two days they stayed at the lavish Camel Hut accommodation, Trevor and his nine pilots did not stop taking passengers on their famous two-hour Lake Eyre tour, the third largest salt lake in the world – a true natural wonder. Seeing the lake is the reason many travellers come to William Creek with its casual, laid-back Australian atmosphere. At the iconic “Tin Shed” historic hotel, there were fabulous meals and Aussie beer at the bar while the William Creek Hotel, had several options for accommodation. Sharon and Roni could not believe the dark blue colour of the sky and billions of bright stars in the Australian desert. Traveling around William Creek provided the group with stunning semi-desert scenery; along the Track are numerous springs feeding water from the Great Artesian Basin, so they travelled to Coward Springs and were amazed by the oasis along with the abundance of water in the middle of the huge, flat arid land – it was a very spiritual place.

After two days in William Creek, they departed back towards Broken Hill in New South Wales, which is the birthplace of the largest mining company in the world – Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd, or BHP Billiton as it is known today. It is also a large base for the Royal Flying Doctors, an Australian icon, and one of the largest and

most comprehensive aeromedical organisations in the world. It provides emergency and primary health care services for those living in rural, remote and regional areas of Australia. After a fuel stop, a healthy lunch and a quick visit to the Flying Doctor base, they continued to Sydney ... or that was the plan. It seemed that God had different plans for the group, and due to severe turbulence in the Sydney basin that even caused cancellations of



*A Dingo, an Australian wild dog, near Trevor Wright's William Creek, Oodnadatta Track in South Australia.*





Back in Sydney after a memorable adventure, (L to R) Roni, Amir, Sharon and Boaz.

Qantas flights, they decided to stay overnight in Wagga Wagga, which has a great airport with an ILS approach.

After enjoying a great lunch the next day they waited until mid-afternoon before continuing on to Sydney. That night they went to a pub to celebrate, where Sharon declared, "This was the trip and adventure of a lifetime. I could not have dreamed of a better way to do so, but only with you guys – my best friends."

Australia is a harsh, dangerous and remote environment for flying, and to make things harder, once you get outside of the big cities it does not have good facilities for tourism – it is very expensive with less than average services. That is what also makes Australia unique; it is an empty continent, the last frontier and the most amazingly beautiful land on earth. The group of old friends travelled over 4,000 nm in four weeks with an abundance of adventure and memories for life. ☺

*Tamra Hyster is married to Amir, one of the "long-time friends" in this article and who also went on the world mission also noted in this magazine. She and Amir are semi-retired "SKlers" (Spending the Kids Inheritance) who live in Sydney, Australia; they have three grown children. They currently own a SR22T and have a position for the Cirrus jet. The Hysters have flown around Australia several times, and in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, Canada and United States.*

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