

## PERTH

DAY 17 – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2008

Yesterday evening, after our tour of Singapore, we decided that we could not possibly visit Singapore and not have a drink in the “Writers Bar” in Raffles Hotel. So that is what we did. It was interesting to watch people come in off the street to photograph the place, or like us, take a drink, just to be able to say that they had been to Raffles Hotel. Sadly the room rates make it too expensive to stay there! We listened to Jimmy play the piano for about an hour, and then left to have dinner elsewhere.

Singapore is the junction of all types of food. We wandered round a former convent that has now been converted to a series of boutiques and restaurants, and found a Brazilian eating place there – one where meat after meat is brought around on skewers, and everyone eats as much as they can until they are full. So Dominic and I had the steak, the chicken, the lamb, the beef joints, the ham, the pork, etc. By then I was full, but Dominic still managed to go for the last skewer – the pineapple (though he passed on the sausages). I think the only way to approach such restaurants is to starve for several days.

Incidentally, Clare texted me this week to say that she had put NINE POUNDS ON, when she went for her weekly session at weight-watchers. Her excuse was that she had not done much exercise since damaging her ankle! At least I had a good laugh at her expense!!

We returned to the hotel, and set the alarm for 5.15 am. After a quick breakfast we took a taxi to the airport and checked in for the flight from Singapore to Perth in Western Australia.

For this part of our Round the World Tour we have now started flying with Qantas. It took us almost 5 hours to reach Perth, but there were some familiar tastes on the way – Cadbury’s chocolate, Walls’ ice-cream, etc.

We had been warned – as all World Youth Day Pilgrims have – about not importing any food-stuffs, plants, or anything that might be a risk of contaminating the continent of Australia. Dominic and I managed to finish off the various snacks we had picked up over the last two weeks, and filled in the forms with a definite “no” to all the answers asking whether we were importing foodstuffs, etc.

The first encounter was passport and immigration. Dominic went straight through, but I was taken aside to discuss my visa – I knew there was going to be extra questioning, since the Australian Embassy had already contacted me at home – mainly because I would be acting as a priest in Australia – which though technically is work, does not warrant a work visa. They were most gracious and sorted things out very quickly.

Next came customs. We had already encountered a “Quarantine Dog”, who went around sniffing bags and luggage. Whenever the dog encountered something that smelt like food it would sit down, and the owner would alert the authorities.

There was a choice of sections to join – those declaring no food-stuffs, and those who were. Most of those who had declared food-stuffs had some confiscated, and other bits were put into bags for zapping with some kind of radiation or the like.

However, we went through the nothing to declare channel. Nevertheless, all our luggage was x-rayed. We went straight through, but it was amazing to see how many had tried to get through packages of food, fruit, and other forbidden items. Many of the Indians on board had clearly spent ages packing – they had boxes and boxes, but the authorities had opened them all, given back to them the cooking pots that they found, but confiscated and destroyed all the food-stuffs they had with them. Since most had come in with more than their baggage allowance (and presumably paid excess baggage), to see 90% of what they brought it destroyed must have been disheartening to them. But why do they do it, when they are warned so often? And it happened to probably one in four passengers travelling. I had seen the Australian equivalent of the TV series “Airport” and had seen this happening before, and so knew what we were in for, but Dominic was quite surprised. He hadn’t believed me that he should eat all his snacks up before entering Australia – but having witnessed the bags and packages all being discovered, he realised that I was telling the truth after all.

We took a taxi to our hotel, and then went out to see something of the city of Perth, Western Australia. I had hoped that we might be able to catch a river cruise on the Swan River, but it is Thursday – and apparently nothing happens on a Thursday here!! So, no cruise! We thought we might take a bus or a tram tour of the city – but it is Thursday, and so the last tour was at lunchtime. So we walked, and walked, and walked!

Perth is known as the “City of Lights”. The River Cruise should have proved that, but the name goes back to the 1960’s when the astronaut John Glenn passed over Perth. As a welcome to him all the residents put on their lights so that he could see the city from space! The name has stuck since then.

Added to that, it is the middle of winter here, and it felt quite cool, compared to the places we had already visited. Further, it started to rain. I had put on a fleece, and so did not feel too cold, but Dominic, ever the know-it-all teenager (well actually he is almost 21), wore just a T-shirt and got more than a little wet!!