

THE OTHER ENGLISHES: AUSTRALIA

Take England, vastly improve the weather and cricket, and you might end up with something a little like Australia. The Angler interviewed Aussie Rebecca Defina to get a better idea about life down under.

First of all, could you tell us a little something about yourself?

My name's Rebecca Defina I was born and grew up in Australia, mostly around the Sydney/ Blue Mountains region. I did my bachelors in Sydney and have now moved to the Netherlands to do my masters in linguistics.

When most people think about Australia, they think of fantastic weather, perfect beaches and odd-looking, dangerous animals. Is Australia really that different to Europe?

It depends on where you go. There are many places in Australia where the weather isn't that different. Tasmania more southern and it can get pretty cold. There are also several places where the temperature doesn't get below 25 degrees. The beaches are good, there are far less people than there are at the beaches I've seen here, and the water seems cleaner and warmer. The animals aren't that odd-looking if you grow up with them, and many of them aren't as dangerous as they are made out to be. However, the dangers of the local wildlife is something I learned very young. There are many untamed places. That is one of the things that have really struck me about Europe: everywhere has been changed by mankind.

Australia is almost incomprehensibly big compared to the Netherlands. How do the various territories differ from each other?

Australians like to find differences and to mark the separation, but I found that crossing the border from here to Germany was a very noticeable difference, to get that level of difference within Australia would be difficult. There is a great rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne; each thinks that they are the best city in Australia. Queensland is more typically 'Aussie'. New South Wales and Victoria are more cosmopolitan, mostly due to Sydney and Melbourne and their higher immigrant populations. South Australia is lovely and quite different; it's a lot quieter than any of the east coast states. I've only been to the southern end of the Northern Territory so I can't say much about it but it's meant to be great. West Australia is the largest state and has the most variation. I love the northern part of Western Australia and the deserts. Tasmania is often viewed as not really part of Aus-

tralia but it's quite an interesting place. The land there is beautiful though and you probably get closer to real mountains there than anywhere else in Australia.

Because it's so big, the average visitor won't be able to see all of Australia. Which parts do you recommend they include in their travels?

Hmm it depends on what they're interested in. I'd recommend the deserts, the Pilbara, the Macdonald ranges, the Kimberley, and I've always wanted to drive across the Nullarbor. Tasmania is beautiful and a rarely visited part of Australia. Many people will want to visit Uluru, Kakadu, and the eastern coastline. Though, visiting all of these would be difficult. It's probably easier to explore the eastern coast line which has the highest population and the best transport links.

What would you say are Australia's most defining aspects/characteristics?

The landscape is quite unique, there's many things that you just wouldn't see anywhere else. I think the Aboriginal culture is an important aspect of Australia. Those are the two things really, most of the rest I feel has been imported from Europe or America.

What do you miss most about life down under?

At the moment, the sunlight and the open wild spaces, and the red dirt of the desert, and of course some of the people I left there. But yeah, the wild places and the light and colours.

Officially, Elizabeth of England is still Queen of Australia. Do you feel any affinity with the Brits, or is this just an outdated tradition?

I don't feel any affinity with the Brits. I think it's an outdated tradition; there is really no mention of the queen in Australia except every few years there's talk of having a referendum to vote on becoming a republic, but it never happens. I don't think most people care enough about it either way to do anything about it. Though there is often talk about changing the flag and the national anthem.

How would you describe Australia to someone who's never been there?

Beautiful. Big, really big. There are still many places that haven't been changed by humans. Dry, lots of desert and it's just starting to come out of a long drought. The people haven't really been exposed to many other peoples and so can be a bit naive, they are pretty friendly though, and often fairly open.

By Leah Clarke