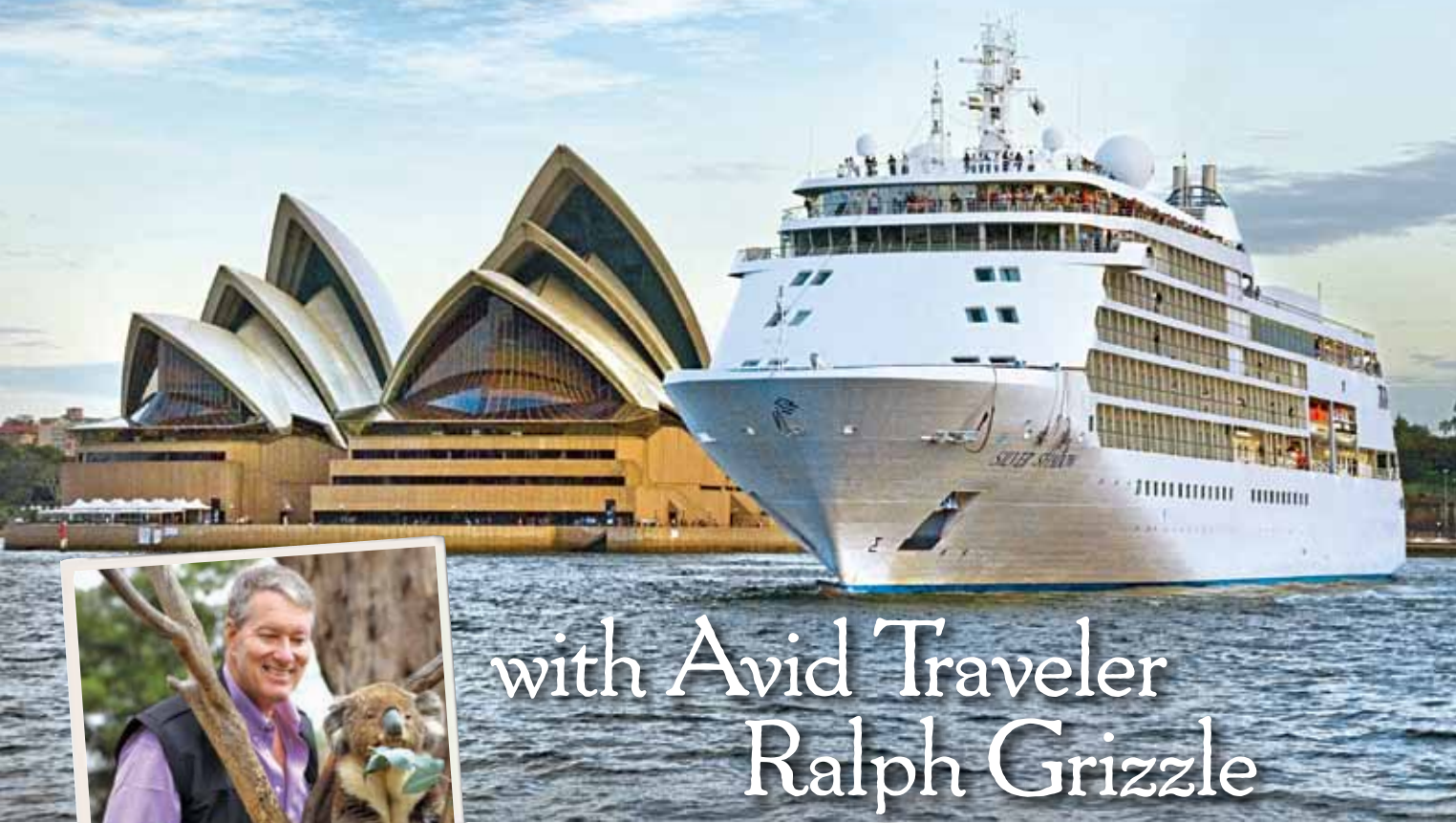


# Cruising Australia & New Zealand



with Avid Traveler  
Ralph Grizzle



Ralph Grizzle is an award-winning travel writer who has spent the past 20 years of his career traveling the world. Since 2004 he has been chronicling his cruise reviews and advice. Here he recounts his recent journey to Australia and New Zealand aboard the *Silver Shadow*.

More than two decades ago, I flew from the United States to travel for six months in New Zealand and Australia as a backpacker, camping and staying in youth hostels, scrimping by on a meager budget. Earlier this year, I returned to those magical lands on a luxury cruise ship, *Silver Shadow*, operated by Silversea Cruises. What a contrast of experiences.

For starters, I arrived in Sydney relaxed and ready to board *Silver Shadow*. Because the vessel is relatively small, carrying fewer than 400 guests, check-in was a breeze. I stepped aboard for not one, but two, Australia-New Zealand cruises, so-called back-to-back voyages, joining two itineraries with mostly varied

ports of call and only a few repeat destinations. I would be on board to explore Down Under for 34 days, beginning with an overnight in Sydney.

I was booked in an ultra-spacious Silver Suite, measuring more than 650 square feet, with separate sleeping and living quarters, walk-in closet, balcony and, get this, a butler. My jaw dropped when I walked into my suite. There, perfectly framed by the threshold to my balcony was the Sydney Opera House. You'd be hard-pressed to find a hotel in Sydney with a better view of the iconic landmark. I decided to have lunch on the balcony. Arvind, the butler, threw a white tablecloth across the table and served me lunch. I was no longer simply cruising Australia and New Zealand. I was cruising with a butler.

I hardly knew what to do with the always-impeccably dressed Arvind, who hails from India, but as it turned out, he helped me “manage” my time on board. Dinner reservations? I needn't lift the phone. The butler did it for me. My fruit platter was never empty; my eyeglasses and sunglasses always spotless; light snacks were on the table in the afternoon. He shined my shoes for formal nights and helped me tie a Windsor knot on other nights.

Later that afternoon before our departure, I laced up my running shoes and stepped off the gangway and onto The Rocks, the birthplace of Sydney and one of its major attractions. I jogged under the Harbour Bridge and along the shoreline. I passed a ceremonially dressed Aboriginal man, sitting near the water's edge and playing a didgeridoo, the ancient wind instrument of the indigenous Australians.

I retraced my route back to the Opera House, where I stopped for a long time to admire its beauty, bathed in sunlight and the warmth of the Australian summer. I passed shops advertising Uggs, the famous sheepskin boots, and a Louis Vuitton window that displayed a kangaroo made up of leather purses and bags.

*Silver Shadow* would take us from Sydney to Melbourne, then to Tasmania. We were there to see the cities, the Outback and of course the unique animals that inhabit this region of the world. I was simply awed by Hobart where we visited an animal sanctuary and got to feed kangaroos, have our photographs taken with a koala and see the elusive Tasmanian Devil.

With a full day in Hobart, we also had time to visit the Port Arthur Historic Site, billed as Australia's “Premier Convict Site.” This is where prisoners of the British Empire were sent, living alongside military personnel garrisoned in this remote part of the world.

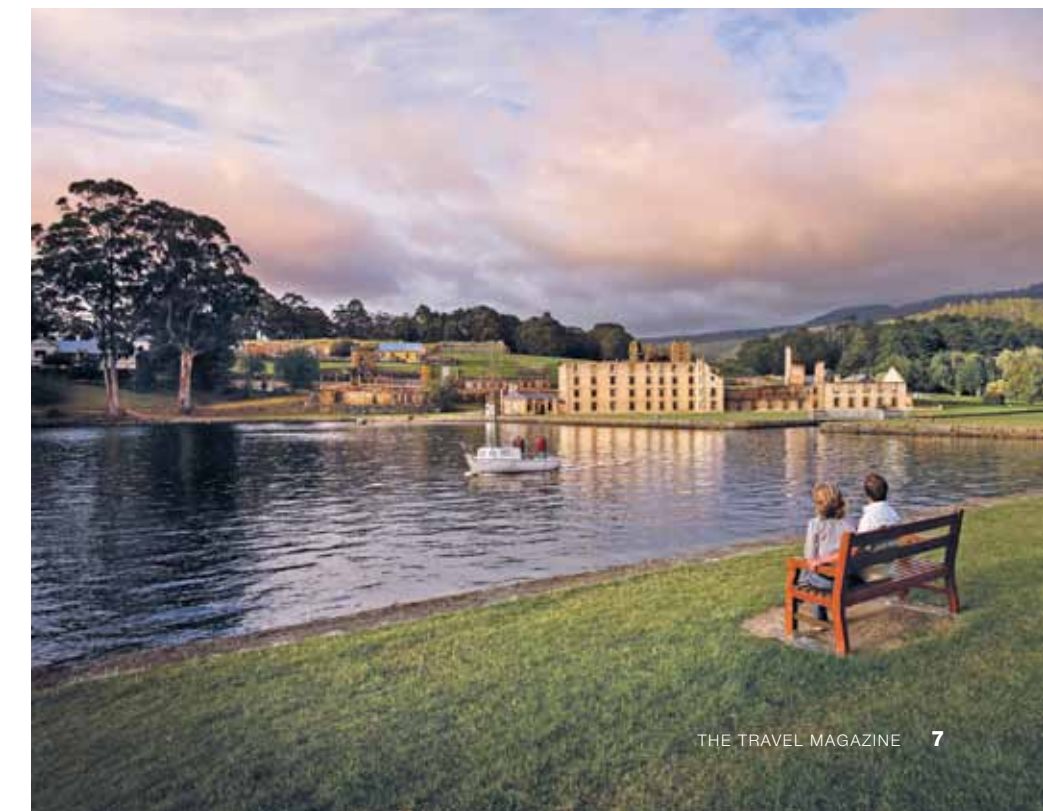
From Hobart, *Silver Shadow* would set a course across the Tasman Sea, also known as The Ditch. This three-day crossing can be “uphill,” as the ship's hotel director put it, but *Silver Shadow* handled it well.

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“My jaw dropped when I walked into my suite. Framed by the threshold to my balcony was the Sydney Opera House.”



FROM TOP: The Rocks, birthplace of Sydney; personalized butler service on board *Silver Shadow*; the famous Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania.







## Cruising Australia & New Zealand

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We called on ports on New Zealand's north and south islands. We cruised the mystical Milford Sound, where waterfalls wept streams of tumbling whitewater. In Dunedin, I boarded a train for a half-day journey through the Taieri Gorge, which was stunning. We stopped in French-inspired Akaroa, where I enjoyed walking the waterfront, and in Picton, where we would

visit the renowned Marlborough vineyards, before boarding to set a course to the North Island.

In Napier, on the North Island, I enjoyed one of the best lunches of my life at the Mission Estate Winery, complemented by the fine wines made at the estate. In Tauranga, *Silver Shadow* glided past iconic Mauao (Mount Maunganui),

the dome of an extinct volcano, to dock on the waterfront. We boarded a bus for Rotorua, where the main attraction is the geothermal pools and a Maori cultural center, there we watched a welcome ceremony presented by the indigenous people.

Auckland marked the end of the first cruise. All but 11 of us disembarked, and by noon, a new complement of passengers began to trickle in. We were in Auckland only for a full day, departing the skyline late at night, with what seemed, everyone out on deck for the spectacular sail-away. *Silver Shadow* was setting a course back to Australia working her way down New Zealand's North Island, including a visit to the tip of the South Island.

Wellington greeted us with warm, partly sunny weather, which made for the right conditions for our Seal Safari. Our trip in four-wheel drive vehicles took us for a brief tour of the city center, before heading up for a view of the city and harbor. After a stop for photographs, we headed over the mountain and along a remote seashore where we spotted seals, lots of them, relaxing on the beach.

We departed Wellington under a full moon. It was another absolutely stunning sail-away as *Silver Shadow* made its way to Picton, back on the South Island, where I and a couple of others hopped on bicycles and pedaled for an hour each way to Karaka Point Historic Reserve, an old Maori settlement.

As we sailed from Picton, the sun sparkled on the archipelago, where blue water contrasted with islands covered in



FROM TOP: Marvel at the beautiful Milford Sound in New Zealand; with fewer than 400 guests, it's easy to get to know the staff and fellow guests on board *Silver Shadow*; the spectacular Auckland skyline.



green foliage. The Tasman Sea was nearly flat all the way back to Sydney, where we spent a full day.

The sail-away from Sydney is spectacular, and on the back-to-back, I experienced it twice. Both times, we stood on deck as *Silver Shadow* made its way past the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, a beautiful perspective digitally preserved on the flash cards of many cameras during the sail-away.

We visited Melbourne once again, overnighing this time. The city oozes charm with its street cars, one that serves as a rolling restaurant, and the Yarra River that meanders through the city center.

We cruised along the south of Australia, stopping in Adelaide and in Port Lincoln, where I joined one of the most memorable shore excursions I've

ever done. I went into the sea to swim among tuna that weighed up to 70 pounds – in a region where there are so many Great White sharks that even the locals think twice before going for a swim. Obviously, I survived.

We visited the small town of Albany, where we did a Pelican excursion and learned a lot about these amazing creatures. Our cruise ended in Fremantle, the port for Perth. Arvind helped me pack and I thanked him for his service during the one month I had been Down Under.

**"We cruised along the south of Australia, stopping in Adelaide and Port Lincoln, where I joined one of the most memorable shore excursions I've ever done."**



Street car in Melbourne

On the flight home, I stretched out to relax and thought about how much had changed in 25 years. Australia and New Zealand were certainly familiar, although both countries had developed and the

cities and towns had modernized and grown. I had exchanged my backpack for butler service on a luxury cruise liner. A few things were exactly the same, however: the beauty, the magic and the intrigue of the lands Down Under. Will I return? I certainly hope so.



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