

HORIZONS



Australia top choice

» Americans' dream destination? Australia, according to a new Harris Poll that surveyed travellers' top overseas choices if costs were not a consideration. New Zealand is ninth. Italy, which was No 1 last year, dropped to second place, leaving the list of the top 10 most popular countries looking like this: 1. Australia, 2. Italy, 3. Britain, 4. France, 5. Ireland, 6. Germany, 7. Japan, 8. Greece, 9. New Zealand, 10. Spain.

London homes

» For Kiwi travellers used to better accommodation than crashing on a mate's beery floor, or who are embarking on their second OE, self-catering in a London home is an appealing prospect. Guy van der Westhuizen, a half-Kiwi (his mother's from Napier), half-South African recently made redundant in London, has set up a business arranging short-term accommodation at affordable rates. Ivy Lettings arranges affordable short stays (minimum two nights) in desirable properties – London homes left vacant while their owners are abroad on business or vacation. Each property, from studio flats to four-bedroom houses, is within 20 minutes of London's key attractions. Ivy Lettings can also arrange airport transfers at competitive rates, maid service, equipment for babies and a host of other extras to ensure every convenience of a hotel, but without the expense. See ivylettings.com.

Bathurst 2009

» Experience Bathurst 2009, New South Wales, the ultimate V8 race, with a House of Travel package that includes four nights accommodation at Big Trout Motor Inn, Oberon, with a five-day Hertz rental car and a General Admission ticket with Paddock Pass (allows you to access the areas where all the behind-the-scenes action takes place). Total price for all days is from \$1279 a person, twin share. Sales until September 18 for travel October 8-12. Airfares are additional. Contact House of Travel on 0800 838 747 or visit houseoftravel.co.nz.

AC/DC in Wellington

» Rock 'n' roll band AC/DC return to New Zealand early next year as part of the Black Ice World Tour. Harvey World Travel is offering packages starting from \$399 a person, twin share, including one night's accommodation, choice of premium ticket (Arena GA standing or reserved undercover seating), admission to a Westpac stadium private room function, cocktail food served prior to AC/DC, complimentary beverages and a souvenir ticket. Phone 0800 80 84 80 or see harveyworld.co.nz. Sales until October 31, 2009, based on Wellington concert during January 30-31, 2010.

Sydney fun run

» August 9 marks the 39th annual Sydney City2Surf fun run, where participants run the 14 kilometres from Hyde Park to the spectacular Bondi Beach. More than 70,000 people take part. Flight Centre has Sydney holidays, including return Christchurch airfares and two nights accommodation from \$555 a person, twin share. Phone 0800 427 555 or visit flightcentre.co.nz. Sales until August 10 for travel now until October 2, October 6-December 30, and in 2010, January 1-26. February 2-March 31.

Cruise French Polynesia

» A Tahitian and Polynesian cruise with 10 nights on the Pacific Princess departing Papeete and taking in Rangiroa, Huahine, Bora Bora and Raiatea Moorea is available from Flight Centre. Included are all main meals and entertainment on board from \$1659 a person, twin share. Airfares are additional. Cruise departures: November 28 or December 8. Phone 0800 427 555 or visit flightcentre.co.nz.

Punakaiki special

» Located near Punakaiki (think Pancake Rocks) on the West Coast and set atop the hill with vistas far and wide, Birds Ferry Lodge is a luxury bed and breakfast that can provide ultimate relaxation. Enjoy two nights accommodation, bubbly on arrival, breakfast supplies daily, a one-hour holistic massage, baked goodies and a cottage dinner from \$299 a person, share double. Sales and travel until September 31. Phone 0800 838 747 or visit houseoftravel.co.nz.

Gunyah deal

» Visitors to nearby Mount Hutt and Methven can take advantage of a slashed tariff at Gunya Country Estates – from \$185 a night for two people (minimum two-night stay). Enjoy a complimentary bottle of bubbly on arrival and breakfast for two. The usual rate is \$395. Visit wotif.com or call 0800 441 092.

Guidebook winners

» Winners of Lonely Planet's Great Britain guidebooks are Sheila Lovell, Joan Rich, Liz Harris, P. Paterson, all of Christchurch; and Maryn Curry, of Akaroa.

A small Outback Australian town is one of tensions, some of which are being soothed by a New Zealand teacher, writes GRAHAM SIMMONS.

Wizard of Cunnamulla



The town of Cunnamulla, in southwest Queensland, has one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. But the efforts of one remarkable teacher – New Zealander Neil Spencer – have led his talented young students to produce some quite extraordinary artworks. In so doing, both teacher and pupils are helping to bring together a deeply divided community.

Dennis O'Rourke's critically acclaimed doco-movie *Cunnamulla*, which painted a bleak picture of a dysfunctional community at the end of a railway line in outback Queensland, made waves in both the movie world and in Cunnamulla itself. The town's bourgeoisie still denounces the movie as rubbish, while its members go about their genteel lives at the gun club, the bowling club and at infrequent (but excellent) race meetings. The 55 per cent of Cunnamulla's population who are of Aboriginal descent meanwhile live in a shadow world, a parallel universe of hidden tensions and frustrations.

As Australian movie critic David Stratton has pointed out, O'Rourke's movie is a selective and jaundiced view of Cunnamulla, ignoring the positive aspects of life in the town. In fact, Cunnamulla is a place of extraordinary beauty, situated as it is on the banks of the tree-lined Warrego River. Come nightfall, the riverbanks become a nature-symphony, as thousands of corellas, ducks and other birds congregate there; bird experts say that over a quarter of all Aussie bird species can be found right here, on the banks of the Warrego.

The sign at the town entrance tells it all: "Welcome to Cunnamulla, settled in the Dreamtime." Aussie towns don't get much older than that, and indeed visitor drawcards abound in Cunnamulla. In good years, murray cod swim all the way up to the Warrego from the Murray-Darling River – nearly 1000 kilometres from the junction of the Darling and Murray rivers at the

New South Wales/Victoria border. Eel-tailed catfish, golden perch (yellow belly), and silver perch are some of the other species to be found in the river.

Cunnamulla's name comes from a pair of Aboriginal words, meaning "stretch of long water" – not a bad appellation for the Warrego. Cunnamulla's history goes back to 1860, when the settlement was at the intersection of two major stock routes – the first from St George to Thargomindah and the second from Bourke (NSW) through to Charleville. Naturally, a large number of pubs grew up to service the thirsts of the drovers – and there is still a "pubulation" of four for a population of fewer than 1500 – as well as an 18-hole golf course that would be the envy of many city communities.

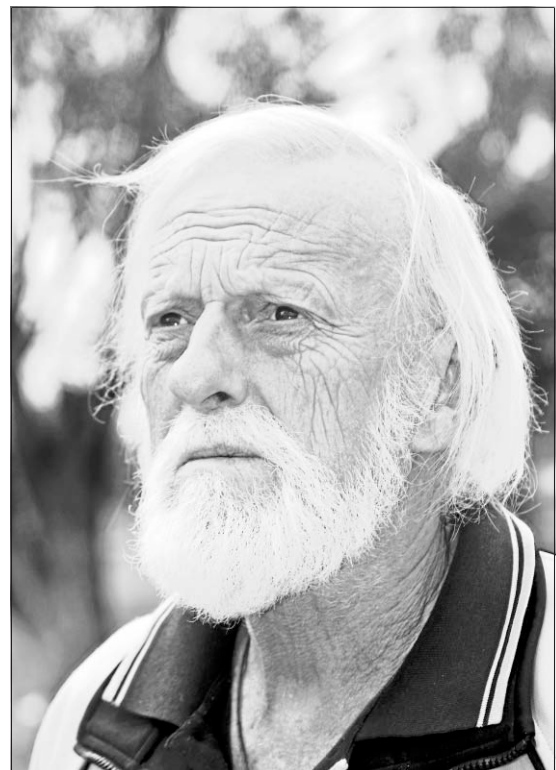
It was into this environment that Spencer stepped 17 years ago. He had grown up in Dunedin before becoming a schools inspector. Upon migrating to Australia in 1992, he applied for a job as an art teacher with the Queensland Department of Education. His first posting was to Cunnamulla, and it's here that he has remained.

Spencer's teaching skills have led his talented young students to produce some extraordinary artworks. Karen Campbell, the principal of Cunnamulla State School (which covers Grade 1 through to Grade 12) is full of praise for Spencer. "He gets stuff out of kids that no-one else can," she says. "No wonder they call him The Wizard of Cunnamulla."

"There are three keys to getting good results from the students," says Spencer. "These are trust, mutual respect and credibility. If you have these, you can achieve anything."

The first key is trust. "You can't bull... here in Cunnamulla," he says. "The kids have to trust you. They have to know that you're the best around. Then they'll say to themselves: 'He (Neil Spencer) can do this, so why can't I?'"

By gaining students' respect, 69-year-old Spencer manages to get equally good results from both



Neil Spencer: Inspiration for art and friendship. Photos: GRAHAM SIMMONS

his Aboriginal and other pupils. He has succeeded as few others have in bringing the different communities of Cunnamulla together. Two of his star pupils, the butcher's son Nathan Tuite and Aboriginal Matthew Nelson, are the best of friends, and both highly accomplished artists, producing striking linocuts of machinery and rural scenes. Sisters Kathryn and Sarah Guttie, together with Jaydee Litherland, have produced top-quality portraits, any of which could easily grace a metropolitan art gallery.

Cunnamulla's ongoing racial problems are one of Spencer's biggest challenges. "Kids inherit racism from their parents," he says, "and it's a two-way situation, with the racism coming from both sides. It's a generational thing that has to be broken."

And there is still a lot of animosity between different groups in Cunnamulla.

"We're still living in a town where people don't trust each other," he says. "It's hard for people to cut through that. But when you do cut through, you can make things happen."

Even on his days off, Spencer might put in seven or eight hours work, whether assessing his pupils' artworks or painting a mural in a local pub. He puts this down to dedication.

"If you believe in what you do," he says, "the barrier between work and leisure kind of disappears."

And the next step? Maybe an exhibition in a major city gallery – but this ultimately for the artists themselves to decide.

What is important is that such a rich pool of talent not be wasted.

No doubt about it – Outback Australia needs more people like Neil Spencer.

□ Cunnamulla is 255km by road north of Bourke, and 750km west of Brisbane.

□ Coach Queensland (book through Greyhound Coaches) runs from Toowoomba to Cunnamulla on Sundays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, returning the following days.

□ Take the Westlander rail service from Brisbane to Charleville, leaving Brisbane at 7.20pm Sundays and Thursdays. A coach connects from Charleville to Cunnamulla.

□ Qantaslink flies daily from Brisbane to Charleville. While in Charleville, take in the cutting-edge Cosmos Centre observatory. Then rent a Budget car or 4WD and

Pupils' artworks: Vehicle, above, by Nathan Tuite, and faces, left, by Jaydee Litherland.



QUEENSLAND DEAL

House of Travel has Queensland packages including return airfares and a rental car. The deal involves Christchurch-Brisbane flights with Air New Zealand, two nights' accommodation at Medina Executive Brisbane in a Standard Studio Room, and 10 days' Hertz Group B rental car hire from \$1069 a person, twin share. Sales until November 30 for travel from now until September 10 and September 13-November 30. Phone 0800 838 747 or visit houseoftravel.co.nz

drive the 197km to Cunnamulla.

□ Where to stay: the just-renovated Cunnamulla Hotel, phone 00 61 7 4655 1102, is recommended. For motel-style accommodation, a convivial atmosphere and excellent meals, try the Billabong Hotel, phone 00 61 7 4655 0800.

□ Worth seeing: the Cunnamulla Visitors Centre, phone 00 61 7 4655 8570, has an excellent bookstore, museum and Aboriginal Art Gallery attached.

□ Brochures: The 100-page Cunnamulla, Eulo, Yowah & Wyandra Information Guide has a wealth of regional information.

To get a copy of the guide, call Peieta Mills on 00 61 7 4655 1679; email: mills@stephanie-millsgallery.com.au; or see stephaniemillsgallery.com.au

WIN DAGG BOOK

Now New Zealand's greatest living comedian despite moving to Australia in 1979, John Clarke – while still a New Zealand resident – invented the black-singleted, gumboot-wearing Fred Dagg. An enduring political satirist, Clarke became a top script writer and personality across the Tasman in taking the mickey out of the Aussies.

Press Escape has five copies of his book, *A Dagg at My Table: Selected Writings*, by John Clarke, published by TEXT, retail price \$28, to give away to readers.

To be in the draw, write your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to: Dagg Contest, PO Box 1005, The Press, Christchurch 8140, to arrive no later than noon, Thursday, August 6. Winners' names will be published on Monday, August 10.



Fred Dagg

Mackenzie's beguiling Ohau

Pat Barrett

Low cloud covers the wetlands and moraine terraces beyond the southern shore of Lake Ohau in the Mackenzie Basin near Twizel.

A faint breeze stirs the lake surface, but not enough to disturb the beauty of the scene from lakeside where I am camped with my five-year-old daughter, Bernadette. It's a chilly dawn and she is still encased in down inside the tent, while I am at the shore attempting to reel off a few snaps as the light gradually descends the Ohau Range, illuminating its flanks and bestowing those crucial ingredients – contrast and colour.

We are camped in an unlikely place, adjacent to the Glen Lyon access road, and arriving here late the previous evening, en route to Wanaka, having visited several tracks and historic sites, and making the most of the fine weather and opportunity to view the lake environs at dawn.

The Lake Ohau landscape is

one of my many favourites in this region, which I love to visit in different seasons, sometimes as a camp before or after a tramp in the nearby hills, or, as on this occasion, part of a trip through the greater area. The steep-sided Ben Ohau and Ohau ranges flank the lake and lead the eye away from the water to high tops and beyond those to the jagged spires of the Southern Alps in the catchments which feed into the lake.

Although the smallest of the trio of great lakes usually associated with the Mackenzie Basin (Tekapo, Pukaki and Ohau), Lake Ohau is arguably the most beautiful. The main body of the lake curves into a large scenic cove at its southern end and forms an inverted comma-shape where luxuriant tussock crowd the shore.

The lake's modest size makes it, in a sense, more accessible and manageable for outdoor activities, unlike the giant bowls of Pukaki and Tekapo to the northeast, which can intimidate.

Boating, canoeing, and fishing are popular here, but



Lake Ohau: Chilly dawn light.

Photo: PAT BARRETT

beware of the nor'west gales which funnel out of the twin conduits of the Hopkins and Dobson valleys at the lake head, whipping a placid lake into a maelstrom in moments.

For us, the dawn remains peaceful, and once the sun completely fills the basin with light there is even a moderate temperature rise, which is pleasing for a photographer chilled to the bone and a little one peeking from the tent door

asking for her breakfast.

□ The eastern shore is accessed west of Twizel on SH18 along the Ohau Canal and Glen Lyon Rd. This road reaches the lake head and Dobson Valley. The southern and western shores, and Hopkins Valley, are gained along Lake Ohau Rd which leaves SH18 15km south of Twizel.

□ There are several short walks possible from the lake shore. □ Map H38

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CRUISING CLOSER TO HOME – 4 AUG 09

With many new cruise lines coming down to our waters, cruising closer to home has never been so popular. From the South Pacific & Australia to the exotic cities of Asia, we take a look at what's on offer for departures both this year and next.

MEDITERRANEAN & BALTICS – 6 AUG 09

The Mediterranean with its crystal clear waters and large array of popular ports is the perfect destination for first time cruisers or those returning for a new experience. 2010 pricing is out now and we have a wide range of affordable cruises for your European journey.

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