

1996

The Czech Republic applies for membership of the European Union.

1997

Cape Canaveral Air Force Station: A Delta II carrying the GPS IIR-1satellite explodes 13 seconds after launch, dropping 250 tons of burning rocket remains around the launch pad.

1998

Lewinsky scandal: Matt Drudge breaks the story of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair on his Drudge Report website.



2002

Mount Nyiragongo erupts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, displacing an estimated 400,000 people.



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Explaining tax rates before Reagan to 5th graders: "Imagine if you did chores for your grandma and she gave you \$10. When you got home, your parents took \$7 from you." The students said: "That's not fair!" Even 5th graders get it.

@ScottWalker

02



I'm upset to hear Arun Jaitley Ji is not well. We fight him on a daily basis for his ideas. However, I and the Congress party send him our love and best wishes for a speedy recovery. We are with you and your family 100% during this difficult period Mr Jaitley.

@RahulGandhi

03



The National Assembly is the only legitimate, democratically elected government entity in Venezuela, and the U.S. supports its important decisions yesterday. We urge all Venezuelan leaders, including the military, to uphold the rule of law and constitutional order.

@AmbJohnBolton

04



House Democrats just rejected an invitation from President Trump to come to the White House for a bipartisan discussion on border security solutions. And they expect voters to believe they're serious about negotiating to find a compromise? Americans aren't buying it.

@RepMarkMeadows

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

Australians are, undoubtedly, having more fun

Australians are also, mercifully, not in the midst of a raging culture war



BARI WEISS

Australia — When Mark Twain steamed into Sydney's harbour in September 1895, journalists peppered him with questions before he had even stepped off the S S Warrimoo. "I am going to write a book on Australia," he proclaimed.

"And I think I ought to start now. You always know so much more of a country when you have not seen it than when you have."

I imagined an exotic menagerie: animals that begin with the letter K frolicking next to shirtless Hemsworths, mostly.

Instead, I found Australia — or rather the teeny, tiny corner of this vast continent that I got the chance to experience this past month — much closer to how David Sedaris once described it: "Canada in a thong."

It is a place where things just work. The politics are moderate. The economy is roaring (at least for now). The strangers are helpful.

Everyone has health care. Mass shootings are almost unheard-of. And I'd feel comfortable following the five-second rule on a random subway platform.

So far, so Canada. But you don't get on a flight across the world just to admire a \$19 minimum wage. You come for the thongs.

Australians have more fun. They just do. I guess I should not be surprised by this fact given that this is the place that birthed both Hugh Jackman and Kylie Minogue.

As someone who is naturally suspicious of people who don't seem to be experiencing some level of existential anxiety during their waking hours, I have watched my temporary neighbours with deep interest.

As I prepare to board a flight back to my natural habitat — bitterly cold and overbenzoed Manhattan — here are some of the lessons I've learned from the sunny Aussies I count myself lucky to have met.

The first: Hang out. But really. In the States, time with friends can feel a bit like those PETA videos of chickens on factory farms: slotted and squeezed into tight compartments.

On New Year's Day in Sydney I spent seven hours at the beach. Doing what, I can't quite tell you. But seven hours spent in a shady spot by the sea with friends and food went by in the blink of an eye.

I haven't had a hangout like that since college. Here, that



Sunset approaching at Manly Beach, near Sydney, Australia.

is typical on any given Sunday.

Part of the beauty of the way Australians hang out isn't just how relaxed it is, but the inclusive, rolling nature of how they socialise. I showed up for a drink at a friend's place one evening last month and within an hour four people had turned into eight and by the time I left more were en route.

Happy hour is simply not a thing because it lasts only an hour. I went to an office Christmas party that began at 3 pm in one venue, stumbled into dinner and then morphed onto karaoke.

When I hailed a cab at 11:30 pm I was the first to leave. In my experience, American office Christmas parties mean that everyone gets a thimbleful of lukewarm Champagne in a plastic cup. We have a lot to learn.

Which brings me to another thing Australians do better: vacation.

My local cafe here closed the day before Christmas. It reopens on Jan 15. And no one here thinks that's strange. January here is like August in France. The only labor taking place in summer seems to be tunneling into coconuts to sip from by the pool.

Many public pools, by the way, are called "baths" in Australia. Parks tend to be "gardens." This makes me feel like I am in a Jane Austen novel.

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Word play here is a national pastime. Christmas presents: Chrissy prezziess. A bar mitzvah: a barmy. McDonald's: Macca's. Breakfast is brekkie, Australia is Straya, avocado is avo, but you already knew those.

You can roll your eyes or you can appreciate the fact that everything here sounds a bit cuter. I opt for the latter.

More profound is how people relate to one another. I've talked with people for hours before they have asked me what I do for work. At home that question can come before "How are you?" I won't ever make that mistake again.

Australians are also, mercifully, not in the midst of a raging culture war. At home, friends are largely delineated by political tribe; couples that date

across the divide are newsworthy.

Here, it is normal. The political is not personal, and that's not just because so many of the big issues that tear Americans apart (health care, guns, the social safety net) are settled. It's that Australians never seem to doubt that there is more to life than politics.

And yet, for all that this country gets right, Australia is a bit like the hottest girl in your freshman class. She looks fantastic in her crop top but suffers from crippling self-doubt.

Some of the insecurity is warranted. Given the tremendous capital and the brain power here, Australia should be a startup nation. Ask Australians why it isn't like Tel Aviv or Silicon Valley and they will invariably chalk it up to "tall poppy syndrome." (Another great Australianism, tall poppies are successful people whose ambitions perhaps deserve to be cut down to size.)

Another obstacle might be how generally pleasant life here is. When you've got a good thing going, it's hard to justify taking a risk that will most likely result in failure. And people here tend to be deeply laid back, a quality that can shade into risk aversion and complacency — perhaps an inevitable result of living somewhere so physically beautiful.

"We congratulate ourselves that we punch above our weight, but in fact most Australians underestimate our country's weight class," Michael Fullilove, the director of the Lowy Institute, a foreign-policy think tank based here, told me. "Australia has the 13th-largest economy in the world. We are an old democracy. We have a continent to ourselves. Given all that, I don't think we punch above our weight, but below it."

A longtime republican in the Australian sense of the word, he partly blames the queen for this state of affairs. "Are we so hopeless that we don't deserve our own head of state?" he said. "I don't think we are. Becoming a republic would make us prouder and more purposeful."

Jerry Seinfeld once called Australia's flag "Britain at night." The sentiment behind that joke, at least how I hear it, touches on something Australians seem to fear about themselves: that they are derivative. Of England, of America, of both.

The faster they can stop caring about what others think — not just other English-speaking countries, but also their fellow Australians — the more interesting and innovative this already great country will be.

(Bari Weiss is an Op-Ed staff editor and writer. She writes about culture and politics.)