

Australia Diary 2018

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1. This was my third visit to Australia. The previous ones were in 2007 and [2008](#). This time we had gone to attend the [International Conference on Leucaena](#) which was held in University of Queensland, Brisbane.
2. Nandini was giving two papers in this conference – one oral and the other poster. The conference was being held after about 20 years and almost everybody working in Leucaena in the world were present. Glaring absentees were delegates from China and Africa.
3. It is always a pleasure to visit Australia – a beautiful country with polite people.
4. The politeness started at the immigration center in Brisbane airport where the lady was pleasant and smiling though it was midnight. The customs officials were also very polite though they singled us out together with other visitors from Asian and Latin American countries for dog sniffing test!
5. Brisbane is a beautiful city with the lovely Brisbane river criss-crossing the city. Besides providing balm to the eyes the river is also used for transportation. Thus from our hotel in Central Business District (CBD or downtown) we could take the ferry to go to any place in the city. I used it to go to the [University of Queensland \(UQ\)](#), St. Lucia campus. As the weather was nice the trip on the ferry was enjoyable besides being very reasonably priced.
6. At UQ met Dr. [Neena Mitter](#) who is doing good work in precision agriculture and indoor agriculture. She gave me a tour of her labs and facilities. At Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane I met with Mark Harrison to discuss sweet sorghum collaboration.

7. Brisbane city has lovely parks, botanical gardens and beautiful footpaths on the river banks. We enjoyed the walks and the fine cuisine in innumerable restaurants dotting the banks.
8. For the *Leucaena* conference there was a road trip to visit various farms north of Brisbane where the cattle were fed *Leucaena* leaves. A luxury bus took 31 participants which included both of us on this trip.
9. We visited many farms and in 3 days covered about 1000 kms. Each farm was about 3000-4000 acres and managed by 3-4 people. It was an eye opener to see such huge farms managed by so few people. Though the operations were completely mechanized it still is hard work.
10. In one farm visit we met with a wiry 75 years old owner who had single-handedly constructed a 55 acres pond. It took him about one year to do so with the help of earth moving machinery and a few friends. He filled the pond with water from the nearby river (he had rights to lift the water from the river) and used it to irrigate *Leucaena* plantations.
11. In all the places and in discussions with older Australians the general refrain was that young Australians do not want to work and want easy life. The good Australian economy also helps in this trend. They surely need more hard working immigrants!
12. Almost all the taxi drivers that we encountered in Brisbane and Melbourne were from India. They generally came to Australia on student visa and after finishing their education ended up as taxi drivers to earn money and repay their loans.
13. Australian government also has a program where labour is brought from nearby places like Papua New Guinea and other areas and these labourers work for 4-6 months on the farm before being returned to their countries. The labourers earn good money and Australian farms get extra help. It is a win-win situation.
14. Australian economy is booming because of exports of mined ores to China and some to India (coal) and also export of agricultural produce. Nevertheless there is very little manufacturing done in Australia. Most of the

things are made in China. In fact China is the major trade partner of Australia.

15. Australians are very helpful and happy go lucky people. Whenever we got lost and were looking at Google maps somebody would come to ask us if we needed help.
16. Nevertheless in every airport our handbags were given extra scrutiny for explosives! Why we were singled out was never explained. Though the security people were very polite and not rough and obnoxious like those in the U.S.
17. Throughout our trip we saw beautiful flowering trees; Jacaranda was blooming in all its glory in almost all the farms we visited and also saw a large number of different varieties of birds. Australia is a paradise for birds, flowers and general greenery. It probably helped that rainfall was received a couple of weeks before our arrival after a prolonged dry spell.
18. University of Queensland at St. Lucia, Brisbane is a beautiful campus dotted with beautiful gardens and lakes. There is almost no difference now in the U.S. and Australian universities in terms of facilities, campus grounds and infrastructure. However the dynamism or the critical mass of innovation of American universities is somewhat missing in the Australian universities. We were told that bright Australian students migrate to the U.S.!
19. Besides Brisbane we also visited [Mount Buffalo National Park](#) and Mount Macedon near Shepparton. My brother Alok who works as an orthopedic surgeon in Shepparton took us to these places. Though these are beautiful mountain resorts, the rains and very cloudy weather dampened the experience.
20. On our way out we spent one and a half days in Melbourne. Highlight of Melbourne visit was the tour of world famous Queen Victoria Botanical Gardens. We walked from our hotel in CBD to the gardens and spent good 3 hours going through them. Thus we had a nice 15 km walk that afternoon.
21. Besides the export of mined ore one of the major sources of funds for Australian economy are foreign students. [They inject 32 billion dollars per](#)

[year](#) in the economy. In University of Queensland we saw the labs filled with Indian and Chinese students.

22. Some areas of Australia have had severe drought. We saw that in the farms we visited north of Brisbane. Yet there is no rain water harvesting and national plan of making canals. With canals, Australia can become greener and much more productive. Even in cities rain water harvesting will help in conserving water.

23. In the conference huge amount of food was left and wasted. There is no mechanism to give this food away to the homeless. The laws do not allow that. We saw quite a number of homeless people in Brisbane and this food could have helped them.

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Photo Montage

1



Roma St. Parkland, Brisbane



Attempt at selfie!



Luecena farms visit



Walk on South Bank, Brisbane



First order of work: Putting SIM cards in phones! Ibis Brisbane



Getting ready for dinner at Thai place, Brisbane



On farm tour. In front of a bottle tree



On farm in Millmerran: Olive orchard behind



Koala on a tree at one of the farms



Bus doubled as lunch and tea vendor!



Lunch stop near a picturesque place



Ferry ride to University of Queensland, Brisbane



Shepparton lake; with Alok and Durgesh



Lake Catani; Mount Buffalo



Melbourne Royal Botanical Garden



Iconic Melbourne landmark;
Flinders street station

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