

***** ***** ***** Merry Christmas ***** ***** *****

Dear Friends and colleagues,

As many of you know, we have been in Australia this year. It has been absolutely wonderful. Life in Melbourne is very comfortable, and traveling in Australia is extremely interesting. We cannot list everything, so the following is a synopsis of our wonderful year. We have added Kazumi and Yukiko's Australian Journal to Kazumi's homepage at www.sla.purdue.edu/fll/personal/hatasa.html.

We arrived in Melbourne in February. It was a shiny summer day. (A big change from Midwest winter!) We were just fine, but it was the beginning of Chibitan's ordeal because she had to be confined in a quarantine station for a month. (I think we were more contaminated and carrying funny stuff than dogs!) We were only allowed weekly visits. She lost weight considerable at the end of the month-long stay, but she quickly recovered from it. She is now a certified Australian dog.

We found a house to hire (= to rent). Setting up a life in Australia is fairly similar to the U.S., but a few things threw us off. People here do not use personal cheques as we do in the U.S. (There is a certain type of tax assessed for every transaction with a personal cheque.) Cash and EFTPOS (acronym for check card) are being used most widely. Another incident was about our rubbish bin (=garbage can). Rubbish bins are standardized and provided by municipalities, so they stay with each house. A collection truck comes weekly. So far so good. One day, a neighbor told me and started telling me very apologetically that the collection person went nuts when he came to our place. He then told me to place the rubbish bin with the front side facing the street. It did not make sense until one day I saw a truck itself. It has an articulated arm which can pick up the front side of a bin and empty it into the back of the truck. The driver is doing it all. No wonder, our guy was mad when a stupid resident placed a bin backward.

The first semester began in March and the second semester in July. Australian students are tamer. Faculty members are more polite and considerate to other colleagues, so being selfish is not acceptable. The school encourages international students to come to study, so there are many of them. There are a large number of Asian students, both Australian and internationals. (It must be somewhat similar to the West coast.) Monash probably has about 1000 Japanese language students, so classes are large, and because of a large number of monosyllabic names like Cheng, Chen, Chan, Cheung, Chong, etc. it is almost impossible to match students' faces and names. Nakama I (textbook for college Japanese) was finally published. We are now finishing the second volume to be published in 1999. The total number of pages we've written exceeded seven thousand pages so far, a lot more than we thought it would be!

During our spare time, we decided to take trips to see Australia. First, we took a very short trip to the Phillip Island where people watch penguins coming back to their nests every evening. People patiently sit on concrete benches and wait for penguins to come home. On the night we were there, we saw a couple of dozens walking back to their nests. We also visited sanctuaries to see famed koalas, kangaroos, and wombats. Koalas are very cute. Less known wombats are also very cute.

In May, we drove out to the Great Ocean Road for about two and a half hours. This is a very interesting coast line where the continent literally drops into the ocean. At least, so it seems. As the coast got washed away, it left funny looking rock pillars standing in the sea. We had seen California and Oregon coast lines before, but this was one different sight. We highly recommend this place.

In July, we took our first long trip to Brisbane, Cairns, and Darwin. In Brisbane, we visited Gold Coast. Gold Coast is like Florida and there are many tourists from Japan. In Cairns, we tried scuba diving in Great Barrier Reef. This was an awesome experience for Kazumi. While Yukiko grew up near the sea, Kazumi had never felt it. In fact, he was so impressed by this experience, he took a diving course after he came back from this trip. He now holds a certification. From Cairns, we flew to Darwin and went into Kakadu National Park. This national park was one of the best parks we ever

visited. It was vast. Animals were so different. The wet land was very pretty. Yes, there were crocodiles.

We had to do Ayers Rock, so we did. The area reminded us of the Southwestern U.S. such as New Mexico and Arizona. Similar colors. The rock was big and we went up there. We still think Monument Valley and the Grand Canyon gives more overwhelming feeling of how tiny we are.

The last trip was to Western Australia. Since Kazumi is certified in diving, he did some diving. (A lot of diving!) Yukiko could not go through the diving lessons because of her past history of ear infections. We flew to Perth and drove south for Kazumi to dive on a ship wreck. Yukiko went on trips into caves. After we came back to Perth, we flew north to a town called Carnarvon, and then drove to Exmouth. Exmouth became famous among divers since this is the only place where whale sharks come on regular basis from March to May. People can swim with them. This town is a hard-core diving town, so if you don't dive, you would feel isolated. Kazumi went a couple of dives and came back with his mouth wide open saying "amazing." After that, we drove to Coral Bay. The beauty of this small town (population of 50) and the coral is indescribable. It is so much better than any of the coral reefs in Hawaii we've visited. Since coral reefs are in shallow water, snorkeling is very enjoyable. On the third day, we took a snorkeling trip to see mantarays (15-foot docile rays without a sting). We saw three mantas and we were totally speechless. They perform underwater back flips to feed themselves while we floated on the surface. They went around and around right under our eyes. This was an incredible site. This was literally a scene from National Geographic. Both of us came out of water with our mouths wide open saying "amazing!"

Although we traveled a lot, this year has been a very productive one for both of us. This is the first time that we can meet the publisher's deadlines without delays. We've also attended a few conferences, Kazumi's paper has been accepted, and Yukiko is finishing up a paper for submission. We learned that taking time to have a fun is very important to increase efficiency.

Now it's a Christmas time. It is funny since the weather is getting warmer and warmer. Yet, we see Santa's in shopping malls having pictures taken with kids just like U.S. Christmas trees are being sold on street, but not as many.

We have one more trip to Tasmania for the New Year. We will be back in the U.S. at the end of January. We were both very glad that we decided to come out here and live here. Although we decided not to stay here for now, we like the country and it has given us a new perspective in our life. Wish you a joyful Christmas and a Happy New Year!

No worries,

Kazumi & Yukiko

***** ***** ***** A Happy New Year ***** ***** *****