

An Australian Dream: A Month of Discovery

Lam Thai Tuan Kiet

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The air in Tan Son Nhat airport on July 25, 2025, was thick with a mixture of excitement and nervous anticipation. For two boys from Ca Mau, myself, Lam Thai Tuan Kiet, 17, and my friend, Huynh Phuc Minh, 16, the dream of Australia was about to become a reality. Dressed in our Mekong Organic Organization uniforms, we left behind the familiar warmth of the Mekong Delta and embarked on a journey that would not only span thousands of kilometers but also open our minds and hearts in ways we could never have imagined.



Our adventure began the moment Minh and I stepped into the arrivals hall at Melbourne Airport. There, with a warm and welcoming smile, was Mrs. Neula, our English teacher and first host. The initial awkwardness of meeting a new person in a new country quickly dissolved into comfort as she guided us through the bustling city. Our first week was a whirlwind of new sights, sounds, and tastes. With Neula as our guide, Melbourne unfolded before us like a vibrant tapestry. We explored the bustling Queen Victoria Market, marveling at the abundance of fresh produce, and wandered through Neula's own beautiful garden, a peaceful oasis in the city.



The city itself was a classroom. Minh and I delved into the world of film and digital culture at the ACMI museum and soared to the top of the Eureka Skydeck, where the sprawling cityscape stretched out to the horizon. A memorable day was spent at Brighton Beach, where the iconic colourful bathing boxes stood in a cheerful line against the sand. It was here we had our first taste of authentic fish and chips, a simple meal made extraordinary by the stunning coastal view. The wonders continued with a trip to Phillip Island. As the sun set, we watched in awe as hundreds of little penguins waddled ashore, a magical spectacle of nature. We even had our first, unforgettable encounters with Australia's most famous residents at Healesville Sanctuary, coming face-to-face with curious kangaroos and a sleepy, cuddly-looking koala.

After a week of urban exploration, it was time for a change of scenery. A bus journey took us to the regional town of Bairnsdale, where we were welcomed into the home of Mr. Alan. Here, the pace of life slowed, and we discovered a different side of Australia. Alan's property was a gateway to the wild. We were stunned to see wild kangaroos grazing peacefully in his backyard and spent hours exploring the garden and the nearby stream. This leg of our journey was about embracing the great outdoors. Alan took us camping with the neighbors, where we shared stories around the fire and grilled delicious sausages. We even tried our hand at archery, a new skill that brought lots of laughter and friendly competition.

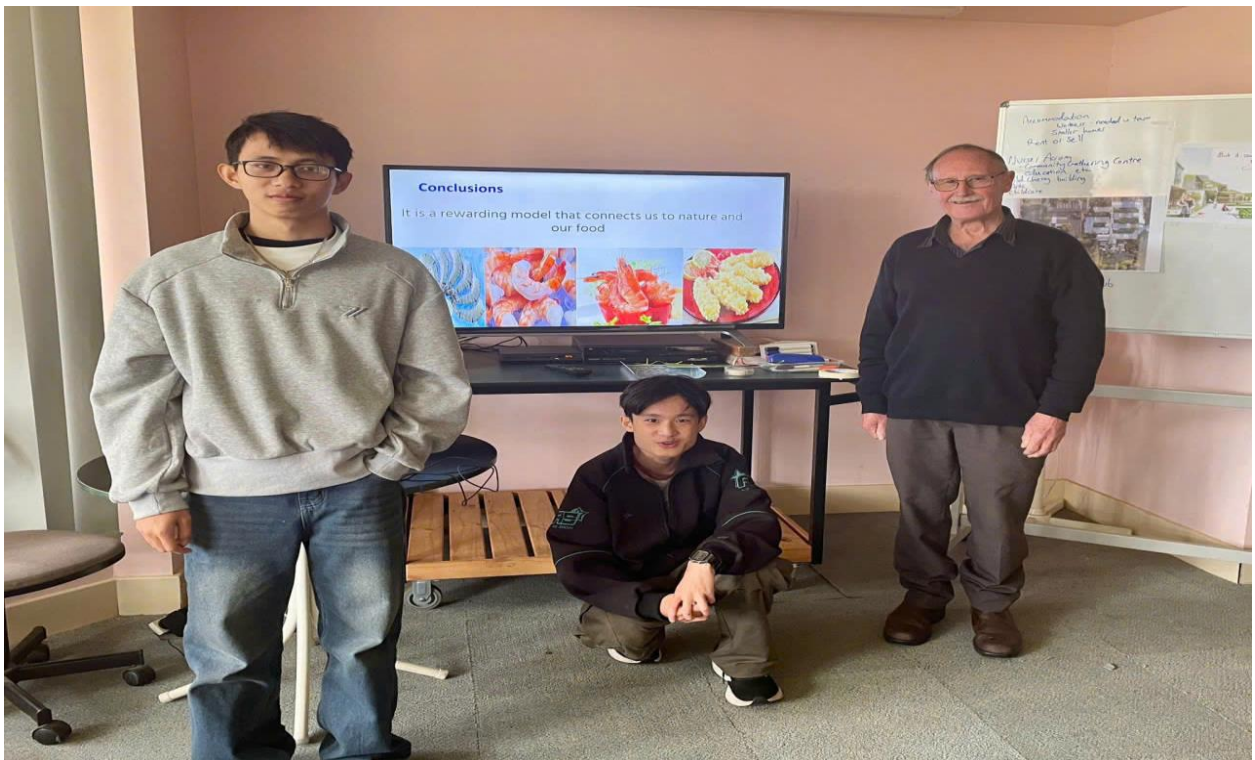


From Bairnsdale, our journey continued to the picturesque lakeside town of Paynesville, where we stayed with Mrs. Gudrun. The proximity to the water offered a new set of adventures. With Gudrun's encouragement, Minh and I tried kayaking for the first time, paddling across the calm, shimmering waters of the Gippsland Lakes. We felt a true sense of teamwork and community when we joined Gudrun's dragon boating team for a practice session, our paddles slicing through the water in unison with the steady beat of the drum. We took leisurely walks along the shore, watching elegant black swans glide by, their dark feathers a striking contrast to the blue water.





For our final weeks, we returned to Bairnsdale to stay with Mr. Alan again. He, along with the continued support of Mrs. Gudrun and Mrs. Pam, ensured our last days were filled with enriching cultural experiences. We attended a local concert, immersing ourselves in the community's artistic life. The trip was not just about sightseeing; it was also a chance for us to share our own culture and knowledge. The culmination of our academic purpose for the trip was a presentation at the local library about the sustainable shrimp-rice farming model supported by the Mekong Organics project in our hometown. Standing in front of a new audience of adults, Minh and I were very nervous, but with the great support of Mr. Alan, we completed the presentation. The response was more positive than we could have ever hoped for, and we were so proud to read the feedback from Mrs. Pam: "This morning, My friend shared that she had also attended the presentation of Kiet and Minh on the rice-shrimp farming model. She said that the two of you were really excellent. They also handled a difficult question posed by a soil scientist (soil expert); she also wondered if the boy was satisfied with their answer. She said yes. After that, she met that man - a soil expert, and he said that you two were very worthy to represent your country, your family and your parents. It seemed that the attendees highly appreciated your confidence and the stories in that presentation. For me, it was great to hear this and I am very proud of two boys both". A particularly special day was spent on Raymond Island, a haven for wildlife, where we spotted numerous koalas clinging contentedly to eucalyptus trees in their natural habitat.



As August 25th approached, the day of our departure felt both too soon and just right. The thirty days had been a kaleidoscope of experiences – from the dizzying heights of a city skyscraper to the quiet rustle of a kangaroo in the bush, from the thrill of paddling a kayak to the warmth of a shared meal with new friends. We had arrived as two students and were leaving as young ambassadors, forever changed by the kindness and generosity we had received. The landscapes were breathtaking, but it was the people who had truly made the journey unforgettable. During our 30-day journey, Minh and I found Australia to be wonderful. We enjoyed many delicious

foods and drinks, the streets were clean and beautiful, and the Australians were extremely gentle, cheerful and kind. I hope in the future to visit and thank them as well as have the opportunity to invite them to visit my homeland, Vietnam, which is famous for its shrimp and crabs.



Our month-long journey through Australia was a life-changing experience, and it would not have been possible without the incredible love, guidance, and support from Mrs. Neula, Mr. Alan, Mrs. Pam, Mr. Gudrun and their families, Dr. Kien of the Mekong Organics Organization, our families, teachers, and friends in Ca Mau, to whom we offer our most sincere and heartfelt thanks./.