





# A PHOTOGRAPHER'S DREAM COMES TRUE

1ST PRIZE

IN HONOUR OF OUR LUXURY ISSUE, AT READER JOCELYN PRIDE STAYED IN THE LAP OF OUTBACK LUXURY AT LONGITUDE 131° TO TRY AND CAPTURE THE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE: A TRULY UNIQUE PICTURE OF ULURU.

A passing comment from a work colleague who shares my passion for photography changed our whole holiday to Uluru. "Bring back a shot of The Rock that I've never seen before!" A pretty stiff challenge since he belongs to a camera club and probably snores his way each week through a multitude of photos of every conceivable angle of The Rock. How do you jag an unusual shot of the natural iconic equivalent of the Eiffel Tower?

This was my first time to Uluru and since my husband and I were celebrating our 15th wedding anniversary, we'd decided to go the whole hog and stay at the ultimate outback resort: Longitude 131°. As the type of person who thrives on a challenge, I visualised returning to work with a treasured photo in hand. (Uluru covered in snow! A herd of wild camels galloping up The Rock!) Little did I know, pursuing "the shot" would see us high above The Rock in a helicopter at sunset, waking up way before dawn each day and taking it in turns to be on watch from our luxurious tent to check for unusual photo opportunities – all of which, I might add, brought another dimension to the romance of the occasion.

Arriving at 131°, or "Longy" as the locals call it, measured up to everything we'd imagined and dreamed about in the months leading up to our trip. It was midmorning by the time we were shown to our home for the next three nights and the view of The Rock was breathtaking – close enough to reach out and touch.

We checked out every nook and cranny of our "tent" (and I definitely use that term loosely) looking for vantage points to set up our tripod. Each tent is complete within itself, suspended high in the air, tastefully decorated on the theme of early explorers and beautifully appointed with every conceivable luxury (even woolly ponchos for chilly mornings.) We discovered the way the mirrors in the bathroom transformed into windows so that every aspect of the tent revealed a view of our Holy Grail. I started clicking away, knowing that this was really just the entrée, but after all it was the first time I'd actually seen this ancient monolith that had somehow so far eluded me.

Over a decadent lunch in the Dune House (the hub of the resort), another guest dropped three little words into the conversation that were like music to my ears: "Blue moon tonight." Excitedly, I asked if the moon would actually rise over Uluru. One of the 131° guides chipped in and suggested that the best view would be from a helicopter and would we like him to organise it for us. A true once-in-a-blue-moon photo opportunity? I could hardly get the words out.

The adrenaline was really pumping as the pilot skilfully manoeuvred the Robertson 44 through the still air, the desert oaks forming patterns on the red earth beneath us. The few minutes prior to sunset is the optimum time for the light to dance on Uluru, creating a kaleidoscope of colour that ends with the deepest red illuminating the whole rock – and the sun was sinking quickly. Maintaining a steady grip on the camera was an art in itself and I was clicking so rapidly I almost missed the full moon faintly appearing to one side of The Rock. No, I wasn't expecting it to be blue (just in case you were wondering), however, the blue sky combined with the tinge of

pink did give the scene a mysterious "this doesn't happen very often" look.

Over the next two days I learnt the many facets of Uluru, how it takes on a totally different appearance depending on the light. Our free tours were carefully planned to take advantage of the magical times of the day – sunrise, sunset and at the isolated, less touristy spots. The tour through Kantju Gorge to the inside of Uluru at sunset presented another photographer's paradise as the texture of the surface of the rock took on the most vivid red hue. Standing with the flame-red rock surrounding me, I felt overcome by the beauty and proud to belong to this incredible country.

I'd waited half a lifetime to see it and here it was right before my very eyes any time I wanted it. I was fascinated by the way it changed, and I'd play a game of turning away and looking back quickly. Each time we returned to our palatial tent, I kept a running record of photographs of The Rock; I had literally thousands and figured that the "blue moon" and inside Uluru shots were the best bet as far as my colleague's challenge was concerned.

That was until our final morning (which also happened to be our anniversary), when we sat up in bed about half an hour before dawn to see the entire area enveloped in mist. Scrambling quickly to the dune in front of our tent (with camera in hand, of course), we watched the desert awaken through a soft haze. Uluru was literally floating on a sea of mist as the first rays of sunlight cut through, creating a dreamlike scene. Desert oaks emerged amid a range of muted colours; droplets of moisture sparkled along spinfex stems. What a way to finish our amazing holiday in this unique location.

But how did I fare with the challenge? Did any of the photographs measure up?

I'll let you be the judge . . . ■

EAR LEFT // The many moods of a remarkable rock . . . including a rare once-in-a-blue-moon image, and some eerie "floating Uluru" shots.