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A COFFEE AND A CHAT IN CYBERSPACE

I remember 'way back' in the last century when I first surfed the net. It was at one of those places called a cyber café; remember them? They were those places where you could surf the net and drink coffee to your heart's content, or at least until your wallet ran dry.

Recently, I was asked by Boxplanet to find out just what happened to the cyber cafés in Melbourne. It seemed a simple enough task, until I was asked to keep to the CBD, where we were 'apparently' likely to get the most hits. But the task proved a formidable one.

When the Internet tidal wave surfed into Australian homes it seemed that cyber cafés, with their high prices and limited booths, were doomed to go the way of the dinosaur.

Nevertheless, the cafés have undergone a quiet revolution the past few years, far from dying out they are now a focal point for backpackers and students who need access to a computer in a hurry or to bang off a quick email home.

Some will offer a casual nights' surfing, combined with a range of programs available for catching up on that last minute assignment. Others have branched out into truly global communication with cheap overseas phone and fax services.

A recent chat with Paul Jones of Myer Rmit revealed the extent of the evolution. A quietly spoken young man in his early twenties, Paul completed a drafting course at RMIT and fell into the world wide web. As manager of the café set in the heart of Myers, he revels in the world of computing. The Myer Rmit café is set on the fourth floor of the Myers complex on Lonsdale Street. It's easy to miss amongst the washing machines and mobile phone department, but once there, visitors can relax in peace and quiet far from the madding crowd. Boasting a 128k link to Telstra, the café provides lightning fast browsing and a range of other word processing and other office programs, along with much needed tuition. The self-serve coffee is of course, Harris Gold and is available free of charge. Downloads are permitted unless of course it's pornographic or illegal, but you already knew that, didn't you?

"Our biggest market is definitely backpackers and students," he muses. "But we do offer computer tuition and the best coffee in town." Actually, the Myer RMIT Café is the ONLY café to offer coffee. He confesses that while they are expensive, "we do have fast access... you do pay for what you get."

Moving further down the line are cafés such as Global Gossip and Global. Just near the Victoria Market, the booths at Global Gossip are small and as Paul warned, "set a little too close for comfort." I've seen sardines with more elbowroom than these patrons.

But the café does offer a wide range of services that set it apart from its peers. For a small fee you can have your CV typed up and printed out, a boon for tourists on a working visa.

There are also other services such as email, cheap overseas calls, job search and CV services, faxing, scanning, copying, printing and binding, mailbox rental, voicemail and cheap international postage.

My next port of call was Global Chat, which has two establishments, one in Elizabeth Street and one round the corner in Flinders Street. One café sells time in advance and the other sells by the hour; check what rates you're paying for first, it's easy to get confused. The cafés are small and stacked end to end with computers. The only concession to privacy being the closed in booths which are stripped bare of creature comforts. Coffee?

Forget it. Like Global Gossip, this is a business only café, it's okay and reasonably priced but that's about all that's going for it. My journey at an end, I detoured through Daimaru, it's been there for years and I haven't been inside yet. I was feeling a little jaded. I honestly thought Melbourne's busy heart would have been brimming with cyber cafés.

But lo and behold, set into the side of a wall under the Shot Tower were two coin operated computer terminals provided by Pienetworks.com. That's right, coin operated. \$1 to start and \$6 per hour. They even have floppy disk drives for downloading email.

Now that's a handy little piece of equipment every shopping mall should have... coin operated Internet booths.

Written by Alastair Rosie

01/05/2000 ©

THE LOWDOWN

Myer Rmit Internet Café * * * * *

Level 4/295 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne 9661 1700

<http://www.myerrmit.edu.au/>

myerrmit@rmit.edu.au

\$10 for the first hour

\$5 for each additional hour.

Coffee is free and there is a food vending machine

Also offers a wide range of course in Word, Powerpoint, Excel, Frontpage, Myob and the Internet. Not cheap but you do get what you pay for, luxurious surroundings and hands on tuition when you need it.

Global Gossip * * * *

440 Elizabeth Street

Melbourne

9663 0511

Hours: 8am-midnight

Charges by the minute although the first two minutes are free 20 Cents a minute for the first 32 minutes then 5 Cents a minute until the hour is up. Then it goes down to \$3 per hour. Offers a wide range of other services as well.

A cheaper alternative but forget comfortable surroundings, this is stripped down and get dirty computing. With their CV service however, it's the first port of call for working tourists.

Global Chat * * *

228 Flinders Street 9663 7899-Melbourne

22 Elizabeth Street 9654 3666-Melbourne

Hours: 9am-11pm Monday-Friday

10am-11pm w/ends

Prices: \$6 per/hour 15 Cents per/minute 30 Cents per page for laser printing. Although patrons are squeezed in wherever there's a free space, if you need to use the Internet it is close to the station. Check their pricing policy first however. One charges in advance and the other is pay as you go. They do offer the usual cheap phone calls.

Pienetworks DIY terminals * * * *

The ultimate in ease and convenience. It's a pity there's only two in Daimaru but hopefully we'll see one in a shopping mall near you soon. These terminals won't let you build a webpage but you can access your email for a small price. What else could you ask for?

ECOTOURISM OR VANDALISM?

Ecotourism: it's the in thing as the western world reels from the climactic technological changes taking place in the world today. An hour online will bring you into contact with a wide variety of tour companies specialising in ecotourism, whereby we, the undisputed masters of our realm tour our subjects, the animal kingdom and the various indigenous inhabitants of abovementioned subjugated realm.

Perhaps that is too harsh a definition for our desire to get back to nature. Like many of us, I too, tire of immaculately groomed resorts and holiday destinations, there's only so much to do or see before we cry, "enough!"

When it comes to ecotourism, Australia is without a doubt one of the premiere destinations for ecotourists. We have vast areas of wilderness just begging to be explored by the outside world while the majority of Australians cling to the coastal regions. However, ecotourism for all its attractions can also serve as another vehicle for the continued destruction of our environment. While we may not be mining in endangered and fragile areas, our very presence there is a threat to an ecosystem that frankly can do quite well without us.

This was illustrated this week when the Queensland government announced plans to cull the dingo population on Fraser Island. This was in response to the death of nine-year-old Clinton Gage on Monday. Clinton was fatally mauled to death by two young dingoes, which were later destroyed. The Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie has ordered an immediate cull of the Fraser Island dingoes in an attempt to be seen to be 'doing something.'

In reality, the Queensland government has been doing something over the last four years.

In 1997-1998, it spent \$795,000 on upgrading visitor facilities on the island. A further \$140,000 was spent on the Presentation of World Heritage Interpretation & Public Contact. Nearly eight hundred thousand dollars later we have tourists overrunning the island treating wild dingoes as if they were domesticated dogs. The fatality was tragic but inevitable as tourists continue to feed dingoes despite repeated warnings by park rangers. It seems that everyone wants to ignore 'Don't Feed the Animals' signs.

Ecotourism is an important and thriving industry but it needs regulations if we are to safeguard not only our family and ourselves but also the very ecosystem we admire. The abolition of ecotourism would in fact shut down whole communities whose livelihood depends on the fact that people want to travel to their isolated towns and villages. Abolition also brings back the poachers who contributed to the decline of our natural resources.

Responsible ecotourism is the only viable solution and that requires a concentrated effort by park managers, local authorities, communities and tourists to ensure that our beloved resources remain intact for many years to come. Before you think about approaching wild animals whether they are dingoes, bears or dolphins think of the consequences of your actions. What we have now is selfish ecotourism, not responsible ecotourism. I much prefer the latter.

Written by Alastair Rosie
02/04/2001

GUIDELINES

- Be aware that you are entering a wilderness area. This means that you leave it as you found it. It doesn't just mean not littering; it also means leaving things as you found them. A photograph doesn't hurt the environment, removal of rocks, plants and soil can and does hurt the environment.
- Don't try to hand feed animals. I know the bear looks cute but it is wild and will react violently when frightened or disturbed. Too many people seem to think that television animals are real. The animals on television are however, not wild but domesticated animals and bear no resemblance to the real thing: television is NOT reality.
- If setting up camp it's obvious that some trace of your presence will remain. Try however to minimise the impact. Carry as much rubbish out as possible and make sure that all fireplaces are properly extinguished. When taking firewood from a forest, take only deadwood and where practical carry firewood into the wilderness area with you. Where available, use established camping grounds; this contains and minimizes the impact on the environment.
- Obey all guidelines set down by park rangers and authorities. It may seem like a drag but these people are trained and have a stake in seeing that the wilderness area remains unspoiled.

DEVONSHIRE FOR TWO

By Alastair Rosie

Word length 779 (not incl. recipe).

It's a familiar scenario for most of us. The kids are screaming, you've had a bad week at work or your partner has decided to join the 'me' generation. Wouldn't it be nice to escape? To leave it all behind for a few hours and pretend that the world is still the same as when grandma bought her bread from the corner store, instead of a supermarket tray? When tea and freshly baked scones were a part of daily life instead of a specialty?

The Devonshire Tea is an old English tradition, consisting of tea (or coffee) and scones. Jam and cream is an essential ingredient of the repast. The word scone comes from the Dutch word Schoonbroot or 'beautiful bread.' Scones are traditionally served in the afternoon with whipped double cream or rich clotted cream. But visitors to England will need to ask for 'Cream tea,' not a Devonshire tea. The correct protocol is to ask for a Devonshire cream tea or Yorkshire cream tea, depending on which county you are in. All counties however, recognise cream tea as our Devonshire tea.

Tastefully Yours, Main Street Olinda 9751 2128. Hours: 10-5pm w/days, 9-5.30pm w/ends.

'Tastefully Yours,' owned by Dennis Sideras is located in the middle of Olinda. His tearoom features award-winning pies of which he is justifiably proud. "People come especially for the pies," he says. A Devonshire Tea here will cost you \$6. The interior is adorned with locally made gifts, which are all for sale. A special feature is the table with six enormous teddies around it. A Devonshire here will cost \$6 with light lunches ranging from \$3.50-\$9.

Old Tyme Coffee Shop
1/698 Burwood Hwy Belgrave
9752 6883

Hours: 10-10pm Wed-Sun 10-5pm Mon-Tues.

Located in the heart of Main Street Belgrave between the hot bread kitchen and the printer, this coffee shop has seen such illustrious patrons as the Premier Jeff Kennett, amongst others. The owners Peter and Christine Smith have been in business for eighteen months.

One of their specialties is the Scrumpy Jack cider on tap along with a fine variety of English type beers. A Devonshire tea is \$5.00 with light lunches costing around \$6.50. The lunch menu is typically English and includes Yorkshire pudding.

Henry Crabbe's Restaurant and Tearoom
2 Kallista-Emerald Rd
Kallista 9752 1082
Hours: 8-6pm (7 days p/w)

Located on Cook's Corner, the tearooms here offer beautiful views of Sherbrooke forest and are right opposite a walking track. The teas here are a little dearer at \$7.50 but with homemade jam and clotted cream you get what you pay for. Peter Feil has been running the tearoom for four years.

Pig and Whistle Tavern

1429 Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd

Mt Dandenong 9751 2366

Hours: 11am till late (kitchen closes 9.30 aprox)

Janine Wilson has been running this restaurant for over seven and a half years. Just around the corner from another famous landmark, the Mt Dandenong hotel. The Pig and Whistle is a fully licensed restaurant open from 11am until late. The menu here unlike other restaurants is flexible enough to allow a Devonshire after dinner and a steak for breakfast.

Speaking of Devonshire, the tea here will set you back \$6.00. The tavern boasts an open fire and exposed beams, perfect for those foggy mountain nights.

Miss Marples Main Street Sassafras 9755 1610 Wed-Sunday 11-4.30pm.

Stephen Hocking runs 'Miss Marples'. His passion for the Agatha Christie novels is evident in the 30s type décor and movie stills. It's easy to picture the Miss Marples of Agatha Christie fame sipping tea here and pondering, 'murder most foul'. The fare is British, right down to the period costumes of the waitresses. He includes traditional English Pies on the menu, along with homemade trifle and ice cream. Light lunches hover around the \$8 mark, with desserts at about \$7. The complete Devonshire Tea is \$7.50. Miss Marples is only open Wednesday to Sunday. Be prepared for a wait on weekends to be seated but the wait is well worth it.

It is not merely the quality of the tea or the jam and scones that sets the various tearooms apart, rather the simple pleasure of taking tea with a friend and watching the world pass by. The tearoom is not just a place to quench your thirst, but a refuge where you can recharge the emotional batteries and wonder if your absence has been missed yet.

On second thoughts, why not a refill?

In an age when espresso and cappuccino has become the drink of choice for many, and 'service with a smile' is given begrudgingly; it is comforting to know that Old World charm at an affordable price still exists.

Breakout

High Valley

448 Mt Dandenong Tourist Road

Sassafras 9755 1596.

Hours 11-4.30pm w/days, 11-5pm w/ends

Devonshire tea: \$8.00

Other fare: light lunches

Features:

- 2kms of walks

- Rhododendron garden

A Passion for Pies

Main Street Sassafras 9755 1399.

Hours: 10.30-4pm w/days, 10.30-5pm w/ends.

Devonshire tea: \$6.50

Other fare: light lunches

Features:

- Sells homemade organic jams and relish
- Features pies and pastries
- Close to craft shops in Sassafras

Fortnum's tearooms

Main Street Sassafras 9755 1200.

Hours: 10.30-5pm w/days, 9-5pm w/ends.

Devonshire Tea \$7.90

Lunches: Yes

Features:

- 'A Room with a View' Spectacular views of Melbourne
- 'Simply Sassy' Lace and accessories shop.
- Close to craft shops in Sassafras

Micawber Park Tavern

Cnr Gully Cres and Monbulk Rd

Belgrave 9754 8660

Hours: 12-11.30pm

Devonshire tea (Sunday only) \$6.50

Other fare: Full menu

Features:

- Queensland and English beer on tap
- Fully licensed
- Close to Sherbrooke forest and Belgrave main street

Kallista Tearooms

Cnr Monbulk Rd and Rivington Ave

Kallista 9755 2659

Hours: 11-4pm w/days, 11-5pm w/ends and public holidays

Devonshire Tea: \$7.50

Other fare: Light lunches

Features:

- Panoramic views of the forest
- Native birds fed outside windows (in feeders).

MELBOURNE'S MYSTIC EAST

Published in Boxplanet in two parts February 3rd and 10th 2000

The gentle sigh of the ocean washes against your eardrums as you eat. The day has been both fulfilling and entertaining. You have retraced the steps of George Bass as he braved the ocean in a whaleboat, relived the devastation as sealers ravaged the coastline and now you are sitting down to a delightful meal by the ocean. Sound like a fantasy?

The delights of Melbourne's mystic east are less than ninety minutes from the big smoke. The eastern fringes have always attracted day visitors and tourists in their droves seeking tranquility or entertainment. Some venture as far as Phillip Island with its nature reserves and rugged coastline while others prefer a short drive to Healesville Sanctuary and a picnic with wallabies and emus. Families seeking something for the kids travel to Coal Creek Historical Park, perhaps in an effort to let their kids know that there *really* was a time when computers and modems were just science fiction.

All these places and others have two things in common, food and entertainment. It's nice to be wined and dined but it's nicer to combine dining and entertainment and there are many places that offer these two attractions.

SEAL ROCKS SEA LIFE CENTRE

Seal Rocks Sea Life Centre is the 'zoo of the future.' Situated at the Nobbies on Phillip Island, it provides a unique opportunity to observe Victoria's growing fur seal population without disturbing them. A camera on the rock beams back the action to giant screens in a cinema. You can take a trip down memory lane in miniature whaleboats, following the route of Bass' epic voyage, relive the terror as sealers decimated the seal population in the nineteenth century and return again to the modern world where thankfully, seals are protected. Afterwards, you can dine in either the Lady Nelson or Bass Brasserie and enjoy breathtaking views of the coastline.

Prices at the Lady Nelson hover around \$14.50 for the Smoked Chicken Caesar Salmon and moving onto Char grilled Fresh fillet of Swordfish at \$23.50. Bass Brasserie on the other hand is more family oriented, averaging \$11.50 for Chicken and Bacon Focaccia and \$11.00 for a Grilled Beef Burger. The Centre is also a short drive from the Penguin Parade and a free courtesy bus is available at the Penguin Centre. Speaking of penguins however, the Lady Nelson is not open for dinner from April through to October, (daylight savings time only) to reduce the risk to 'jaywalking' penguins out sampling the nightlife.

<http://www.Phillipisland.com/>

The Nobbies, Phillip Island

Phone: (03) 9793 6767 or 1300 36 7325

Catering: (03) 5952 9336

HEALESVILLE SANCTUARY

Founded in 1934 and famed for its captive platypus-breeding program, the sanctuary is a popular place for Melburnians, especially for those of us with overseas relatives. The park is set in beautiful bushland and provides ample picnic opportunities. Picnic hampers can be

purchased from The Bistro at \$7.00 for the basic pack and \$15.00 for the gourmet pack, an extra \$4.50 will buy a bottle of wine. If you're dining in however, the average meal is around \$12.00. Healesville also has various programs running throughout the year, phone first for details or check their website.

<http://www.zoo.org.au/>

Badger Creek Road, Healesville
Phone: (03) 5957 2814

COAL CREEK HISTORICAL PARK

You've all heard of Sovereign Hill, but Coal Creek remains one of Melbourne's little known treasures. Located near picturesque Korumburra, it is an authentic coal-mining village from the period 1879-1920. It features a 2 kilometre tramway, Woodleigh Railway Station, the Black Diamond Mine, Water Wheel, bushcraft demonstrations and regular mine explosions (trust me, they're real enough). The Creek Café offers quick meals on the run while the Pig and Whistle Mine Hotel is a fully licensed hotel catering for the more discerning diner and serving local cuisine. Prices start in the Creek Café at \$6.50. The Pig and Whistle also caters for weddings and special functions (phone for complete menu).

<http://www.coalcreekvillage.com.au/>

Follow the signs from Korumburra (adjacent to the South Gippsland Visitor Information Centre). 1800 630 704 (toll free)
Catering: (03) 5655 1811

YARRA VALLEY DAIRY

Located on McMeikans Road in the charming Yarra Valley, the dairy is famed for its cheeses and cheesecakes. The dairy is an actual working farm servicing Melbourne markets but is also available for light lunches. I recommend the antipasto cheese platter at \$18.50. Open for lunches only, the main meals are around \$15.00, starting at \$6.00 for a cheese tasting, well worth the money for cheese lovers. They also have cheese making demonstrations and other activities. Only a short drive from Yarra Glen, it's worth stopping off on the way through just to recharge tired batteries.

McMeikans Road, Yering
(Closest corner St Huberts Road and Melba Highway)
Phone: (03) 9739 0023

SINGING GARDENS OF C.J DENNIS

Feeling sentimental? Maybe you hearken back to older simpler days when the day was long and your life less hectic. After filling up on cheese, take a stroll around the singing gardens of Australia's 'sentimental bloke' C.J Dennis and enjoy a devonshire tea or hot soup. Entry to the gardens is \$2.00 and includes poetry readings. The gardens are situated in Toolangi, not far from Healesville and provide the perfect spot from which to explore the Great Divide. There is seating available for around 60 and the café serves devonshire teas from \$6.00, Sunday roast (\$12.00) and Saturday night dinners (\$32.00). For an extra

\$5.00 you can tour the messmate forest at night in the company of a ranger (subject to numbers). The gardens are just down the road from the Forest Discovery Centre, which offers a closer look at the fragile Australian bush.

98 Main Road, Toolangi

Phone: (03) 5962 9282

GLOBAL BALLOONING

Well alright, perhaps you want to just fly away and leave it all behind. You can with the balloon tours Melbourne has become famous for. Global Ballooning offers a sunrise balloon flight over the Yarra Valley culminating in a champagne breakfast at one of the many wineries in the area. Patrons are however, advised against wearing high heels, (that includes the men as well!) as there is a short hike from the landing field to the winery. Flights cost from \$195.00 per person and are pre booked. Your place of departure will be advised once you have paid. The company does reserve the right however to cancel flights without warning due to weather conditions. Many B and Bs offer a package deal that includes a champagne balloon flight. Details can be obtained by phoning or visiting their website.

<http://www.globalballooning.com.au/>

389 Swanston Street, Richmond

Phone: (03) 9428 5703

HEGEND MAZE

But who can afford that? You can afford this however, Hegend Maze in Healesville would have to be the perfect place for young mums with little ones, not to mention bigger kids like yours truly who just want to stay young at heart. The site has two giant mazes, a huge draughts board, mini and frisbee golf, treasure hunts, board games and puzzles. The light lunches here range from \$2-7.00, very affordable and loads of fun.

22-34 Glen Eide Road, Healesville (opp. Sanctuary)

(03) 5962 3636

So there you have it, the definitive guide to Melbourne's mystic east and yes I know I've missed out on heaps of places but that requires a guide book, not a short article. Have fun and don't forget to drive to survive, lots of breaks along the way and maybe you'll find some of those places I've missed.

Place: HEALESVILLE SANCTUARY

Address: Badger Creek Road Healesville

Restaurant/Café name: 'THE BISTRO' 5957 2814 (Sanctuary 5957 2800)

Seating: 80

Licensed: Yes

Hours: 9 - 5pm 365 days

Lunch/Dinner: Lunch only

Average price of meal: \$9.50

Admission Price:

- Adults \$14.00
- Children (4-15) \$7.00

- Concession (adult) \$10.50
- Family (up to 4 kids) \$38.00

Special Features: Provides picnic packs

- Basic picnic packs \$6.50
- Gourmet picnic packs (incl. wine) \$16.50
- Takeaway section has healthy alternatives

Place: COAL CREEK HISTORICAL VILLAGE

Address: Korumburra 5655 1811

Restaurant/Café name: PIG AND WHISTLE MINE HOTEL

Licensed: Yes

Hours: 10am - 4:30pm

Seating: 50 - 60 in comfort

Lunch/Dinner: Serves only lunch but dinner available (bookings essential)

Average price of meal: \$2.50-\$8.00

Admission Price:

- \$11.00 adults
- \$5.50 children
- Concessions available

Special Features:

- Historical village
- Uniquely noncommercial

Place: BUXTON ZOO

Address: 2600 Maroondah Hwy Buxton (3.2 Kilometres past the Buxton hotel)

PH: 5774 7345

Seating: 56

Licensed: No

Hours: 24 hrs a day (catering for injured animals)

Admission Price:

- \$6.00 adult
- \$4.00 child
- \$15.00 family

Lunch/Dinner: Lunch

Average price of meal: \$8.00

Special Features:

- Privately run zoo with local and exotic animals
- Specialises in 'Peasant Chinese Cuisine (pork Thursday to Saturday only, Chicken, beef. other days)
- Mineral waters from Kyneton

Place: YARRA VALLEY DAIRY

Address: McMeikans Road Yering
(Closest corner St Huberts Road and Melba Hwy)

PH: 9739 0023

Seating: 90

Licensed: Yes (locally made wines)

Hours: 10:30 - 5pm

Admission Price:

- \$5.00 Adult
- \$4.00 children
- \$16.00 family

Lunch/Dinner: Lunch (all day)

Average price of meal:

Entrees/desserts \$6.50

Mains \$15.00

Special Features:

- Working dairy farm.
- Cheese making demos in near future
- Specialises in cheesecakes

Place: SINGING GARDENS OF CJ DENNIS (The Sentimental Bloke)

Address: 98 Main Road, Toolangi

PH: 5962 9282

Seating: 60 people (prefer 40)

Licensed: Yes

Hours: Closed Friday, open Saturday night for dinner

Admission Price: \$2.00 admission fee for entrance to gardens

Lunch/Dinner: Lunch on w/days, dinner Saturday night (pre-bookings essential)

Average price of meal:

- Lunch \$11.00
- Dinner \$32 - 35.00

Special Features:

- Guided tour of gardens (4 acres) accompanied by poetry readings
- Guided Saturday night tours of Messmate forest (incl. In \$35.00 dinner)

Place: GLOBAL BALLOONING

Address: 389 Swan Street, Richmond www.globalballooning.com.au

PH: 03 9428 5703

Seating: Between 1-20 people

Licensed: Not while flying

Hours: Meet at launch site (to be advised) half an hour before sunrise

Admission Price: \$195 per person. Discounts apply to group bookings of five or more.

Lunch/Dinner: Breakfast

Average price of meal: \$195

Special Features:

- A balloon flight over the picturesque Yarra Valley or Mansfield followed by Champagne breakfast.
- Close to local hotels and B &B's
- Views second to none
- (Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult)
- Wear light hiking boots as some walking may be required

Place: HEGEND MAZE

Address: 22-24 Glen Eide Road Healesville (Opposite sanctuary)

PH: 5962 3636

Seating: 40 in tearooms (plenty of seating outside)

Licensed: No

Hours: 10 - 4:30pm

Admission Price:

- \$8.00 per person
- \$6.50 for three or more (automatic family concession)

Lunch/Dinner: Devonshire teas/light lunches

Average price of meal: Most expensive item \$6.00

Special Features:

- Puzzles on table
- Giant draught board
- Two giant mazes
- Board games for wet days
- Treasure hunts
- Mini golf and Frisbee golf (disc golf)
- Very affordable day for families

Written by Alastair Rosie ©

Word Count 1,067 (total)

Thursday, July 26, 2001

Written by Alastair Rosie

ALREADY I'M SO LONESOME...

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'Already I'm so lonesome I could die... The above line from John Denver's *Leaving on a Jet Plane* could well have been penned with pets in mind. Animals have an intuitive nature when it comes to their owners. They know you're going, you know that they know you're going but neither of you wants to admit it.

Sadly, many pets are either abandoned or foisted off onto a begrudging relative or friend around this time of year. In the last minute Christmas/holiday rush, many discover too late that boarding kennels and catteries are booked up well in advance of the holiday season. Many of us feel understandably guilty when leaving pets with relatives or friends; animals have a way of working their way into our hearts. After all, if you could take your beloved pooch/cat on holiday you would... wouldn't you?

For the last few years however a new industry has been steadily growing in Melbourne's leafy suburbs. Call them pet sitters, dog walkers or house minders, they're the people whose job it is to feed, walk, and cuddle your beloved pets. They also take in the mail; water the plants, feed the fish, clean the birdcage, take out the bins, turn lights off and on and some give your garden beds some much needed weeding. It's all in a days' work for these unsung heroes of the holiday season.

Some like Sharon from Emery Pet and Home Services have experienced the hardship that the holiday season brings. A former advertising consultant who was often called away on business trips she tired of bringing home stressed out dogs and cats from boarding homes. Her dogs inevitably came home with kennel cough. When a serious illness six years ago forced her to reevaluate her life, she took note of the little pleasures like walking the dog. The idea grew from there and she now services clients in the Beaumaris, Brighton and surrounding areas. "You couldn't do it for money," she admits and while she confesses to missing the high salary of her former job, she enjoys her new career. "I talk to animals from the moment I see them... I have the best customers in the world.'

Many pet sitters also walk dogs and administer medication for owners who work long hours or who don't have enough time on their hands, a boon for busy executives. However they are not a cheap way out of responsible pet ownership and most pet sitters will object if they see an owner is just too lazy or irresponsible to look after an animal.

A pet sitter takes the time to get to know the animal first before the owners go on holiday. According to Valerie Hughes of TLC Pet Care. "If an animal won't come up to me on the first visit I won't take the job on." This unbridled devotion to their 'animal customers' under the guise of customer service also gives the owners time to evaluate the sitter before they entrust them with their pets and in many cases the keys to their house. Most come armed with forms for owners to fill out and require up to date contact numbers, veterinary numbers, details on medication and any tips they may require when looking after the animals and property in question. Personal service means many work on a trust basis and find much of their work comes via word of mouth. Payment can vary with prices ranging from \$8 - \$25 per day (about the same as a boarding establishment).

The sitters I spoke to charge collectively for all animals on a property, but some will bill you for each animal. For those traveling overseas or looking to take that ultimate 'millennium holiday,' a discount can usually be negotiated.

Compared to the alternative, a pet sitter/house minder can be a viable choice for many when considering that next trip or weekend away. It is comforting to know that as we wing our way out of Melbourne this summer that there will still be a friendly face to greet our beloved pets.

Written by Alastair Rosie
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DOS AND DON'TS WHEN DEALING WITH PET SITTERS.

DO'S

- Do provide emergency numbers, as well as a recent history, including any allergies you pets may have.
- Do leave enough food to last the duration of your holiday; pet sitters are not a charity and can't pay for extra food out of their meagre earnings.
- Do make sure that instructions are clearly written and understood, and obtain their phone number in case you forget something.

DON'TS

- Don't expect pet sitters to 'live' at your place, they have other customers who need caring for, as well as a life of their own.
- Don't impose on their time with extra 'little' jobs, they have more than one customer and try not to ring them every day to see if the house is still standing.
- Don't leave a chronically ill pet with a pet sitter, it's not fair on the animal or the sitter. Sacrifice your leisure time and either stay at home or make other arrangements, after all, pets *are* for life, not just for Christmas.