

# Sydney Commute

We would like to acknowledge the Gadigal and other Traditional Custodians of the lands described in today's story. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. Gadigal together with all First Nations people cultures and customs, have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime.

The sun is setting down over the Great Sydney. The vibrant red, orange and yellow colours of the sky are slowly dying away, taking the warm spring air with them. You take a slow deep breath, feeling your lungs with the cool air. You release it, together with all the pressure to be someone today. You step out on the street, your shoe's sole echoing when you step on the almost empty street. It is time to go home. It is time to rest.

Until the end of the day, you have only three more decisions to make. The first one is how to go home. You can get the Central Coast and Newcastle line train until Epping and catch the bus for 10 minutes ride. This is the fastest option, and it takes only 45 minutes. Or you can get the 292 bus from Wynyard. With the bus, it will take you almost an hour and 20 minutes until you cross your front door, but you can see the sunset behind the Sydney Harbour Bridge. You decide in favour of the bus, so you can enjoy the view and don't need to change transports. It is only a 10-minute walk from where you are to Clarence Street and stand R, from where you will get bus 292. Clarence Street is one way street with two lines. The street is packed with buses and taxis at this time of the day. The bus stop is near a traffic light, making this part of the street even busier. The bus stop is full of people. Everyone is trying to go home and leave behind their chaotic work life and persona. Most people are tired, so they stand silent and often look towards the right from where the buses are coming. Your bus should come in 7 minutes, so you put on your favourite relaxing music and walk 10 metres to the closed wall where you can lean against it.

The first bus that comes is M40, with the final destination of Bondi Junction. A large part of the people that go on this bus looks like tourists. Their expression show tiredness together with the excitement of discovering new places. A gay couple with two adorable twin toddlers are entering the bus. The adults look exhausted, with huge dark circles under their eyes, but enthusiastically pretend to listen to their kids discussing how big the bus is. Upon entering the bus, you can hear one of the kids grabbing the OPAL card and saying, "Me, Me". The doors of the bus close, muffling the second kid's voice and amusement with the colourful bus seats. The buses in the Sydney area are all the same. The exterior colours change from light blue to red, and the most common have blue front and back, with a white middle. If you see one, you have seen all, with their yellow handlers and poles and red or blue seats. The patterns on the seats are generated with computer algorithms with the only purpose of looking fresh and hiding any stains. If you look closely, you will notice that the pattern of a square unit is

repeated throughout all the seats. The colours are always dark blue or red, and the pattern never has large areas with only one colour.

Immediately after the Bondi Junction bus comes the N90, it is going to Hornsby. The destination reminds you of the second decision of the evening. Will you or will not return the call to your friend? It is not something important because you just received one call, no follow-up calls or messages. You are physically and emotionally tired from the day, so you decide not to call. Your friend will understand when you explain tomorrow morning. You need to clear your head and emotionally prepare for the next day. So, you increase the volume on your phone to the maximum and try to lose yourself inside the music for the rest of 4 minutes while waiting for the bus. You are not surprised that the bus is late due to the traffic, so you take a deep breath in and out, in and out. It is just five more minutes. It's not the end of the world. Bus 288 comes before yours. You can get on this one, but you will need to walk 10 more minutes to get home, so you decide against it. A few seconds later, you see your bus coming, so you get behind the queue of people that is forming. There are around 10 people in front of you. It is an articulated bus with two rigid sections linked by pivoting joint. So, you don't need to worry about a place to sit and wait patiently for your turn. You enter through the front door and see one of the regular's bus drivers. You friendly greet the driver, scan your OPAL card and look for a seat. You see one just before the rear doors, after the black joint of the bus. The bus is slowly filling with people. A person just slumped on the chair behind yours, letting out a deep sigh. You are already tired, so, without hesitation, you put on your headphones again and continue listening to your favourite music. Isolating yourself from the people around you and their energy is the only way to keep your inner health up.

The bus starts moving, and Wynyard's stop is left behind with all those strangers trying to go home. Before you realise it, you are already near Millers Point, on the road leading to the Coathanger. The Coathanger, best known by the name Sydney Harbour Bridge by the tourist, is a fascinating structure. Finished in 1932, it is one of the most famous bridges in the world. It is made of 53,000 tonnes of steel, the top of the bridge reaches 134 meters above the water, the arch span is 503 meters, and it is made of 6 million handmade rivets. The arch was built first, and after completed, the two roadsides were built simultaneously. The northern section was built a little bit ahead, just in case they miscalculated the alignment. The story goes that on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1930, the arch's two halves were joined at precisely 10 pm. It has 2 pedestrian walkways, four railroad tracks and a motorway with 8 lanes. It can expand or contract up to 18 cm in response to the weather. It is interesting how a steel object can attract many people to Australia.

Just before entering the bridge, you can see the green copper domes of the Observatory on your left. It is an old-looking building, at least by Australian standards, made of sandstone blocks. The heritage building is located in the middle of Millers Point and has one of the best views in Sydney. The site has changed functions over the years, from a fort to a meteorological station, to a museum. In 1796, John Davis, an Irish convict, built a windmill giving the location its name, Windmill Hill. 13 years later,

Governor John Hunter ordered the construction of a fort on the highest point of the hill to be used to defend Sydney against possible French invasion. The fort had a gunpowder magazine and 6 powder cannons. Never used for war purposes, the place started to be used as a signal station. A flag semaphore system was used to communicate with ships and a signal station on the South part of the harbour. Due to its new function, the locals started to call the area The Flaggie, in true Australian fashion. The same year, the second hospital of then British colony was built on the hill. It was used only for 23 years and later converted into a school. A telegraph house was also built in 1847 due to the demands of the increasing maritime movement. In 1859, the current Observatory was built on top of the fort wall. The construction took two years and included the installation of the time ball, better known as the marine clock. The time ball is a 120 kilograms bright yellow ball attached to a 2-meter pole located on the Observatory's roof. In the past 163 years, the ball was dropped over 58 765 times at precisely 1 pm. Before the radio or the digital clocks, this cast iron ball was the only way to convey the exact time, so the ships could adjust their marine chronometers when arriving and leaving the harbour. The dropping of the ball was such a precise matter that in 1877, the timekeeper wrote an apology in the journal for dropping the ball 3 seconds later one day. To this day, the tradition of dropping the ball at 1 pm is still maintained, allowing people to experience a part of the past. The Observatory was functional and used by astronomers until 1982 when it was converted into a museum due to air and light pollution. The telescopes are working and are used by visitors who enjoy the wonders and experience the vastness of the cosmos.

The moment you come on the bridge, you can see a plethora of boats roaming in Sydney Harbour. The high-speed ferries are constantly transporting people up the Parramatta River or to any of the small bays in the harbour. Other smaller boats are also visible, from not-so-small and fancy yachts to powerboats and sometimes even kayaks. People are enjoying the harbour heritage tour cruises and load party boats. Entertainment on the water in Sydney is a booming business. You can have a fancy meal with cabaret shows, enjoy a peaceful dinner with a spectacular sunset view or even partake in an immersed experience on a pirate's ship. During the whale watching months, the harbour gets even busier with boats living several times a day, full of people excited with the idea of seeing those giants only a few meters away. Sydney Harbour provides endless entertainment and a lavish lifestyle for people with money.

It is getting dark slowly, and the neon lights of Luna Park are already pursuing the sky. This amusement park has lightened the sky in the past 87 years, with the exception of several periods. The first one was in the Second World War, during which, although open and one of the favourite places for the servicemen, the neon lights were turned off in case of a Japanese attack in Sydney. It was closed in 1979, 1988 and 2020 for several years due to different reasons, but working almost non-stop since 2004. The only thing visible of the Luna Parks from the bridge is its weird entrance. The two 36 meters towers are linked by a 9 by 9 meter smiling face. The towers were inspired by the Chrysler Building in New York. They have the same Art Deco style, built from fibre cement sheets covering steel frames,

and they are replicas of the original towers built in 1935. The current face version was placed in 2004, and Luna Park resident artist Ashley Taylor maintains it. The early versions of the face were built to inspire a thrilling sensation and a fear in the visitors passing through the gaping mouth. The chubby face has pale-looking skin, pink cheeks, and a red upper lip. Its black eyelashes are made of conduit and fibreglass, making the enormous blue eyes stand out even more. Its yellow sun rays crown make the entrance look alive.

In a blink of an eye, the lights of Luna park are behind you, and a sea of concrete highway full of colourful cars is opening in front of you. Sydney CBD is behind you, together with all the excitement of the vibrant city. Slowly, the darkness swallows the world outside, and your reflection is the only thing you can see through the window. You do not look so bad, a little bit pale for your skin tone, but the summer is coming, and you will have time to enjoy a few days on the beach. The brown circles under your eyes can be treated with a few more hours of sleep in the following days. How you look right now, at this moment, is not important. The skin suit we wear every single day can get some occasional stains and holes, but with the proper diet, some physical activity and in some cases with mental support or even pharmaceutical help, those stains can be washed and the holes filled. The important things are to focus on the moment and not let the problems and worries take the wheel and drive your life. At the end of the day, Bill's constant complaining or Jess's ability to find problems that do not exist is just the day job's problem, and you should leave them at work. No one pays you extra for the energy you spend worrying about deadlines and trying to satisfy people that do not care about you. Is it worth it even if they paid extra 100-200 dollars? Or you will spend the extra money on counselling and complain about how stressful your job is. In the end, this is the only life you will ever have. So, just forget about how stressful your day, week, and even the year have been and just try to breathe.

Inhale deeply in the count of 4, feeling your lungs and belly. Fill the air, expand and fill you with energy and hope. In the count of 6, slowly release it, relaxing your shoulders and trying to let go of all emotions. Breath in for 1,2,3,4 and release for 1,2,3,4,5,6. While taking in the air, think about the oxygen feeling in your lungs and your body absorbing it, giving your cells all the energy they need to break down the sugars and produce energy, replenishing your energy levels. While releasing the air, consider all the unnecessary CO<sub>2</sub> your body is getting rid of. Try to use this instant to forget about all your problems and get rid of them for the present moment. Focus on your breath and how the air feels when you fill your lungs and belly, the pressure builds in those areas while keeping the air in. Focus on the sensation of relief when you exhale. Inhale for 1,2,3,4 and release for 1,2,3,4,5,6. Inhale for 1,2,3,4 and release for 1,2,3,4,5,6. Inhale for 1,2,3,4 and release for 1,2,3,4,5,6.

Some of the people around you are talking, and others are looking into their phones. There is even a lady reading a book. All of those people are living on the same planet as you, but they, the same as you, are absorbed in their own world. What those people think about you is none of your business. Strangers on the bus or online are entitled to their own thoughts and opinions, and whatever you do will

not change them. Just accept that some things are out of your control and let them go. Do not let their comments live rent-free in your head. Take all negative though, all self-hatred and shaming and expulse them out of your mind, make them leave the same way as all those people need to leave the bus at the last stop. Imagine that the bus is your head, and give shape to each negative thought that you have. The “I am not good enough” thought body of a tiny old lady with a white hair and an expression of disappointment tattooed on her face. Make her get out of her seat and leave the bus, leave your head. Take the next negative thought and do the same. One by one, make them leave, one by one (said is slowly and wait 30 seconds). When you expel them all, see how empty the bus is, and feel the relief and the sensation of emptiness in your head and body. In the end, you take your most precious valuables and leave the bus too. Do not look back, just enjoy the sensation of air touching your body. Maybe the sweet smell that is around you and think about what makes you happy. Tomorrow will be another day, and it is in your power to decide how much the chaos and negativity around you should affect you.