

## Bukhara, Bushfires and Me



Credits: photography life.com

September 2019 and we are traveling in Uzbekistan, enjoying the delights of Bukhara on The Silk Road when we get the first inkling that things will be grim this fire season- Binna Burra has burnt! Surrounded by Lamington National Park – rainforest! Described by National Parks as “Lush rainforests, ancient trees, spectacular views, extensive walking tracks, exceptional ecological importance and natural beauty make this Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area an outstanding place to visit.” It was quite surreal to try and get our heads around the fact that the rainforest was burning.



Credit: Brisbanetimes.com.au

However, that was on the other side of the world to where we were at that time, so we continued with our travels, little knowing how affected we would be by bushfires before the seasons end.

A month later, at the end of November, the bushfire situation had changed, with the Green Wattle Creek fire charging towards us. Discussion time - fight or flight? We decided on the latter and packed our valuables and left them at the ready at the front door. We are fortunate to have a campervan, so we ensured it was stocked with food and water, the bed made and a change of clothes in the cupboard.

The next week was spent in a flurry- cleaning gutters, and clearing all debris from around the house. This was done in the haze of the fires and with the constant sound of sirens in the distance.



December 5th and my husband is visiting his elderly father in a nursing home in Sydney. On his way home in the early evening through the smoke, the traffic heading away from our area seems particularly heavy. We live in a dead - end street and with only one road out of the area, I make the decision to leave as soon as he comes home. With great relief he comes down the driveway as dark falls. We take the valuables, the packed campervan and the car and head to Camden showground, where we park near the pool (level ground), have a light meal and fall into our bed. The next morning, we are greeted by clear-ish skies, bird song and Camden-ites walking their dogs around the fields. Another surreal moment.

With a deep breath (of fresh air!) we head home. We hear that the fires have come within 3 klms of home, are still raging, and that some of our friends in nearby suburbs have had the fires on their doorstep, their houses saved only by the noble efforts of the RFS and other fire fighting crews.

December 6<sup>th</sup>. As we spend the morning frantically clearing more rubbish from around the house, we ponder our next move. We can hear the roar of choppers and sirens coming closer up Werombi Rd and the smoke pall is choking. By the middle of the day, we long for clear air. We head to the shopping mall (!) sit with a coffee and contact friends who live in the Blue Mountains as we have a dinner engagement with them that night. "Bring the camper", they urge, "stay the night". Thank you!

December 19<sup>th</sup> We are driving home from a visit to Goulburn when the traffic on the Freeway comes to a crawl, then stops. We are between Mittagong and Bargo stuck in a jam of about 50 vehicles. We hear sirens, see smoke and choppers overhead and fear the worst. Illegally, we carefully we cross the median strip and take the Mittagong exit, stopping at the tourist information centre in Mittagong to find out more. The news is that the fire had closed the freeway and all traffic had been diverted, except, of course, the kilometre or so of traffic between the fire and the diversion which was stuck on

the freeway...that was us! We join the many other cars and trucks making their way (very!) slowly and carefully down the winding Macquarie Pass.



Two hours later we arrive at Albion Park and eight hours after leaving Goulburn, we are home, safe and well and, of course, still concerned for those in Bargo who were battling the fires.

That is someone else's story to tell.