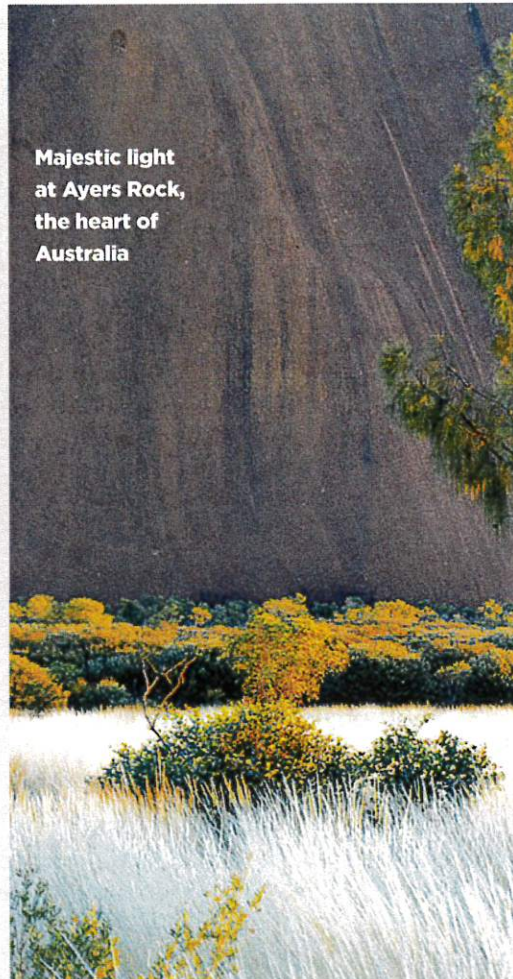


cyber visit



Sydney Opera  
house showing  
off for the  
annual Vivid  
festival

Majestic light  
at Ayers Rock,  
the heart of  
Australia

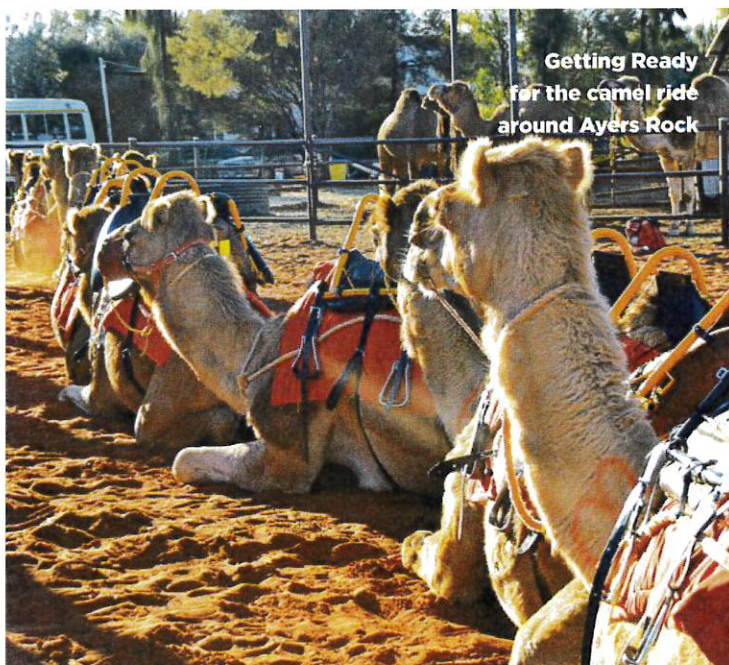


# E-mail FROM SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Nur Heitz moved to Australia in 2001. As a Cape Malay and Muslim, it was initially difficult for her to find her feet but gradually, through food, she made friends and settled in

by LIESEL PIENAAR

Tropical sundowners  
to cool down a Sydney  
summer night

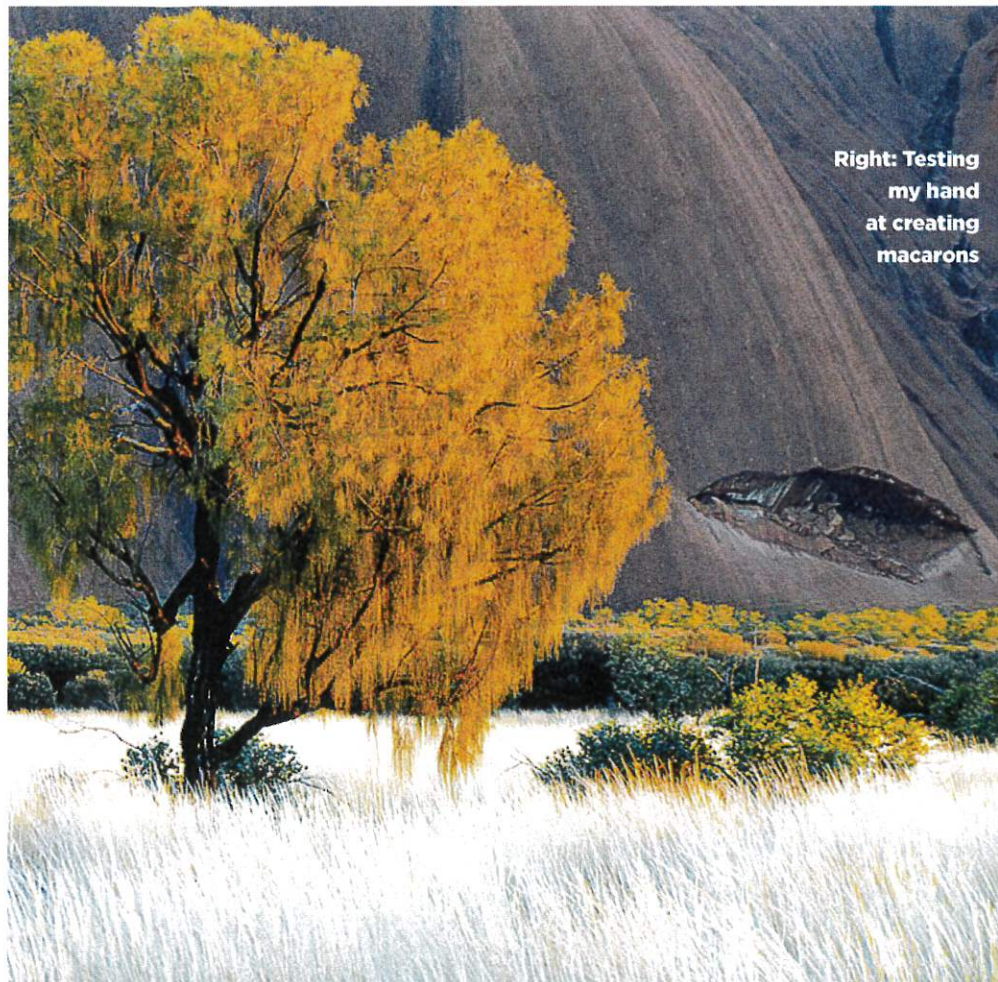


Getting Ready  
for the camel ride  
around Ayers Rock



My happy place, my kitchen





Right: Testing  
my hand  
at creating  
macarons



### Why Australia?

I went to London in 1996 to experience Europe as a backpacker. After two years there I met my future husband, a German, and we married shortly after that. We started thinking about having a baby and I quickly realised that London was not where I wanted my children to grow up. When I became pregnant, I was determined to return to South Africa, where my family is, but my husband was against it and so we started looking at different emigration options.

We got the green light for Australia around the time of our child's first birthday. When we arrived here with our suitcases in June 2001, I was overwhelmed by heartache and wondered how I would be able to bring up my son, Zafir, as a Malay man in this country.

### You raised your children to know their roots?

We moved into a flat in Sydney and I started teaching at a Montessori school where I could take Zafir with me. I struggled to make friends because a person of colour was quite unusual in our area. As a mixed couple we often had people staring at us. The fact that I am Muslim and don't drink didn't help. When my husband began travelling regularly for work, I was alone for long periods



The Sydney fish  
market is always  
a treat for the  
freshest of  
them all



## cyber visit

at a time and the first year or two I felt very isolated.

Until my family told me about a Cape Malay community about an hour and a half away ... Old friends of my mother had been living there for years – I didn't waste any time driving there. I was instantly introduced to a whole new world in Sydney – it was almost like being in Woodstock, the Bo-Kaap, Salt River and Wynberg all in one. It was wonderful to eat curry with other Cape Malays, to be able to eat with my hands and laugh and chat about things that were familiar to all of us and introduce my child to the culture. This community has become part of my family and my life changed immediately. I could buy halaal meat, even masala!

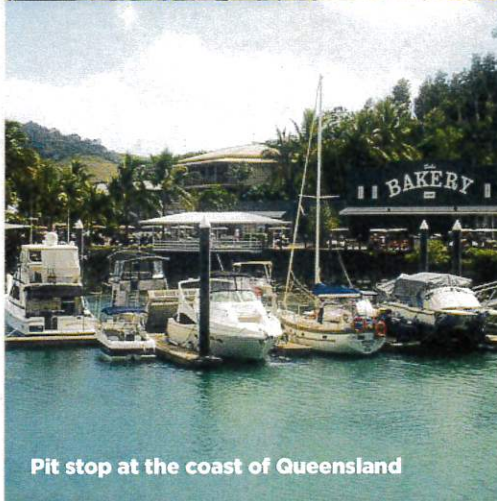
I soon mastered dishes from rotis to koesisters and samoosas. I discovered a love for cooking because it was no longer about simply putting food on the table, but about serving delicious Cape Malay meals.

In the meantime, our lives were enriched with a daughter, Nuhaa, and our son started attending the German International School, where I made friends more easily. I enjoyed hosting morning teas where I showed off my cultural heritage. Cape Malay cuisine became my escape and I also taught it to my children so they would know all about their heritage when we visited Cape Town.

My children are now 20 and 16 and although they have a strong bond with Australia, they identify as Cape Malays.

### **Your career path has had a few twists and turns.**

When Nuhaa was on the way, I opened my own small Montessori



Pit stop at the coast of Queensland

school at home. However, once Zafir needed to go to school, things changed again because the German school was about an hour's drive from us. I closed my little school and started baking birthday cakes and cupcakes. Before I knew it, I was inundated with orders and had to work all hours to get everything done, while still making sure the children weren't pushed aside. In between I earned more teaching qualifications. Then, when Nuhaa also started at the German school, I took up a post there as well.



The Three sisters in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales, is a sight to behold at any time of day



Stopping along the coast for traditional fish and chips  
Left above: Lunch with a friend

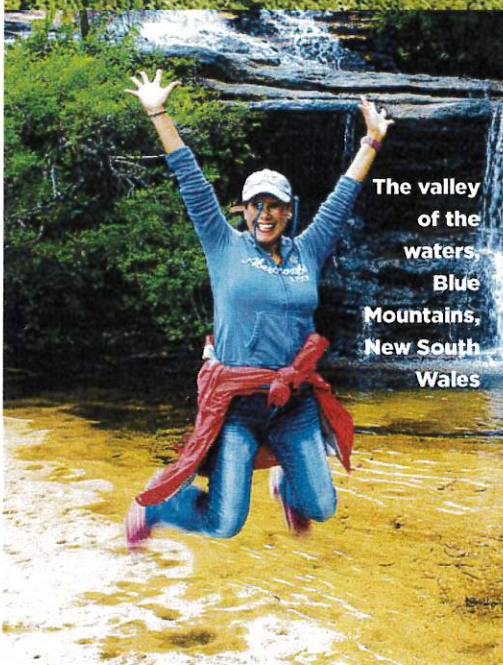
I DISCOVERED A LOVE FOR COOKING BECAUSE IT WAS NO LONGER ABOUT SIMPLY PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE, BUT ABOUT SERVING DELICIOUS CAPE MALAY MEALS

I carried on with the cake business, but with an increased focus on traditional cakes. To gain more self-confidence, I signed up for a patisserie course.

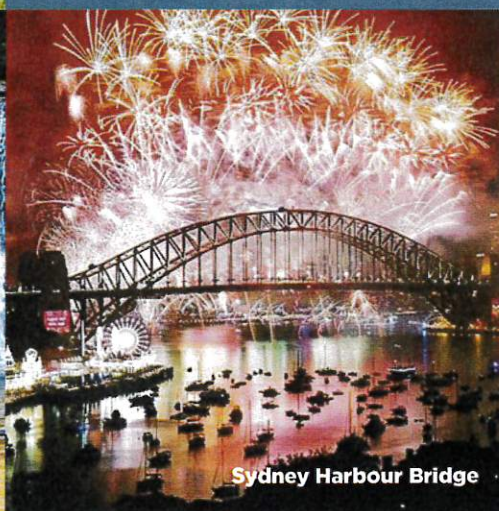
At some stage I realised the baking was a creative outlet that provided an income, but teaching was my passion. Over the years I became increasingly aware that an ordinary school didn't always offer all children everything they needed. I read a bit more widely and discovered the world of play therapy. Then I did a three-year course, which included an internship. These days I work with an amazing organisation as a play therapist for children aged between three and 12. I have the privilege of working with indigenous children in remote areas and sometimes even with children overseas.

### Australia is known for ...

When people think about Australia, they think about wine, koalas and kangaroos, but it is much more than that. Aussies are outdoor people, and their houses are built to accommodate this lifestyle. Their love for wine is extraordinary and their enthusiasm for food can be seen

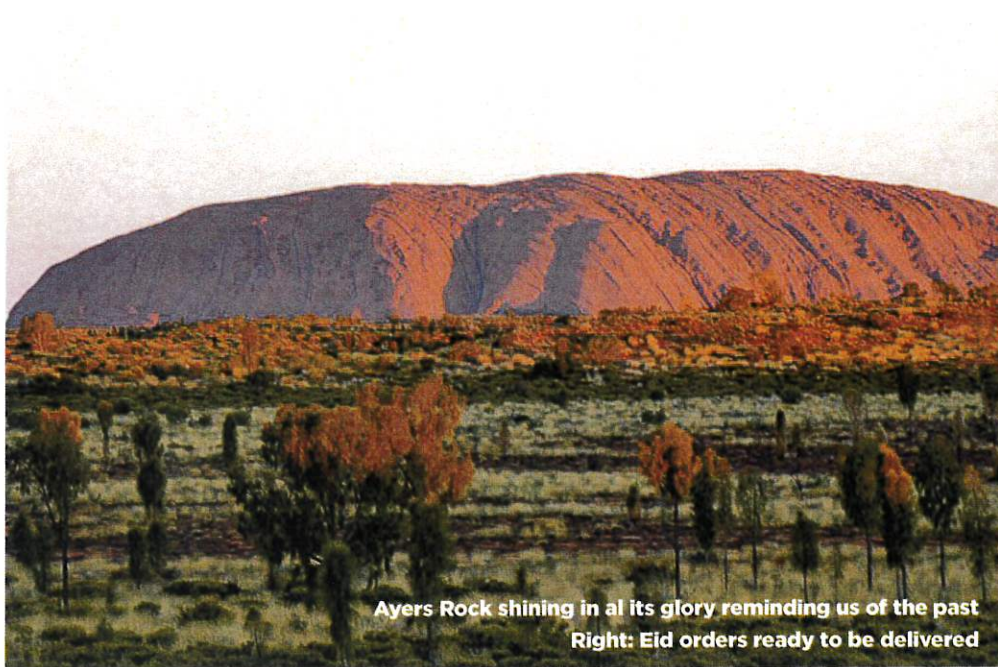


The valley of the waters, Blue Mountains, New South Wales



Sydney Harbour Bridge





**Ayers Rock shining in al its glory reminding us of the past  
Right: Eid orders ready to be delivered**



in the incredible restaurants offering cuisines from almost every country you can think of.

The "sausage sizzle" is their version of a boerewors roll, except that they eat the sausage on a slice of bread. And no children's party is ever without "fairy bread" – a slice of bread and butter dipped in cake sprinkles and cut into quarters. It still amazes me!

The beaches are world famous, of course, with a variety of choices – from those with free braai areas and picnic tables, playgrounds and clean facilities to more unspoilt surfing beaches and tourist destinations.

Beach cafes and restaurants are busy all year round, catering for people who eat, drink and stay fit. This healthy lifestyle is infectious and you can't help but want to be outdoors. Also, families like to exercise and keep fit together.

### **What do you miss most about South Africa?**

I miss my family, culture and how you buy fruit from the smous (hawker) with his smile and a rhyme that makes you chuckle. In Australia we obviously also have wonderful experiences, but to do them with your family is just completely different ... the laughter, music, food. To chat to old friends over a coffee and a koesister, picking up the threads as if you saw each other just yesterday, is beyond compare.

### **What was most difficult in the beginning?**

The most difficult was being a person of colour on the north coast of Sydney, but things have changed a great deal in the past 20 years. My children struggled to make Aussie friends because they don't eat sausage sizzle and Vegemite (similar to Marmite). I taught them from a young age not to eat meat when they went to parties, because it wasn't halaal. It was tricky for them and they often didn't go because they felt pressurised to eat things that they weren't allowed. Later it became easier for them simply to say they don't eat meat – it was as if people respected that more.

Now that they are older, they face new challenges such as not drinking when they go out with friends. It's sometimes difficult for them, but I have also taught them that if someone doesn't respect your point of view, then they are not really a friend.

### **Interesting facts about the Australian accent?**

The Aussies have a fascinating way of abbreviating words. For instance, for "this afternoon" they will say "this arvo", "breakfast" becomes "brekkie". Then there is also the "ute", the abbreviation for "utilities vehicle", what we know as a bakkie! I've been here 20 years already and I still hear accents and words that make me laugh.

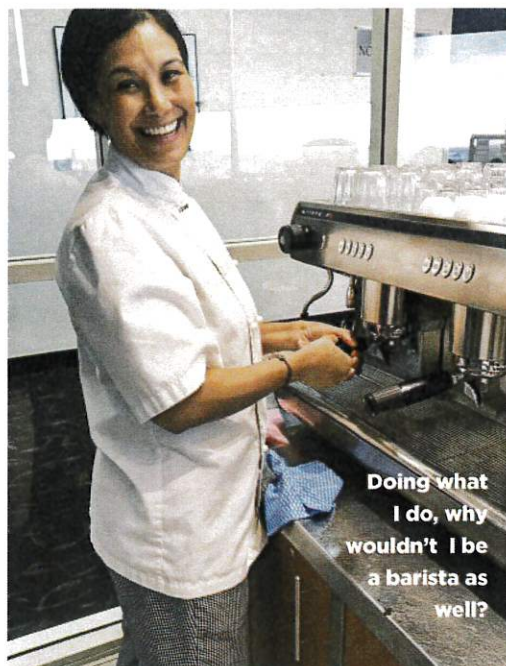
### **Arriving at the Whitsundays**



### **Papunya, 5 hours drive inland from Alice springs**







Doing what I do, why wouldn't I be a barista as well?

I MISS MY FAMILY, CULTURE AND HOW YOU BUY FRUIT FROM THE *SMOUS* WITH HIS SMILE AND A RHYME THAT MAKES YOU CHUCKLE



Turning 50 with a bang!

### The koala bear is one of the most endangered species on the planet. Why?

There are a number of reasons why they are endangered. Population expansion has led to a growing demand for housing. People are always looking for land with the best views, which means bush clearance and encroaching on their habitat. Instances where they have been run over by cars or attacked by dogs have also been reported.

Photos supplied

An increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has had a negative influence on the nutritional value of the bluegum leaves that they eat, while disasters such as droughts and bushfires have also had a deadly impact.

### What is the difference between a braai and a "barbie"?

Actually, they are very much alike, it just feels very different being with other South Africans.

### How have the indigenous people and Asians influenced Australian cooking?

The Asian community have brought flavours to Australia that have stood the test of time. Think about lemongrass, shrimp paste, puddings made with sticky rice and black beans or deep-fried turmeric chicken cooked in a

delicious sambal. While I'm writing this, my mouth is watering at the thought of tamarind and lime leaves, or chilli and fresh coconut. All these ingredients are readily available in the supermarkets, and if you don't want to cook, you can just walk down the road to the nearest Eastern restaurant.

Unfortunately, the ingredients used

by the indigenous people don't really have a place in Australian cooking. They live mostly on what can be found in their specific area. It could be anything from plant or animal origin to larvae and small insects. I have met a few exceptional chefs who do use the ingredients in their dishes and had the opportunity to discover wattle-seed gelato and cookies-and-finger-lime gelato on patisserie business.

### Name one summer dish you will find in almost every Australian home.

Summer for the Aussies means balmy evenings and socialising around the pool, and seafood is one of the big favourites. You will struggle to find a dinner-party table without a platter of mixed seafood and a salad, followed by exotic fruits and perhaps pavlova, which is usually bought and decorated.

### Anzac biscuits are very popular in Australia. Why?

These biscuits (Anzac stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) are one of my favourites, with the textures and flavours being a total comfort with a hot cup of tea. The biscuits, which came into being during the First World War and are made from ingredients that don't spoil easily, were originally known as "soldier's biscuits". Today they are still part of the Anzac commemorations on 25 April and can usually be bought in special tins and packaging in the run-up to the day.

### Australia is one of just eight countries that have a national coat of arms with an edible emblem, the kangaroo. What is your favourite way of cooking it?

I have never actually cooked it myself. I have seen it prepared in restaurants, however. The best way is to marinate it or rub it with spices and let it rest overnight out of the fridge. Sear it in a hot pan, add a little bit of water and cook it in its own juices.

The meat can also be used in stir-fries, cut into thin strips for salad or enjoyed as steak with side dishes. ■

### DO YOU LIVE ABROAD?

Tell us more! Send an email to [pieter.hugo@sarie.com](mailto:pieter.hugo@sarie.com).