



Arch of triumph

Sydney from atop the famous Coathanger is simply stunning, **Briar Jensen** writes

TAKING the family to Sydney? Then consider climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Children as young as 10 can climb accompanied by an adult, making it a great family adventure — one the children can brag about at school.

While my 11-year-old son was eager to climb, my husband and 15-year-old daughter were more reticent. However, post-climb and despite hubby disliking the descent, they're all happy they've done it — and have the photos to prove it.

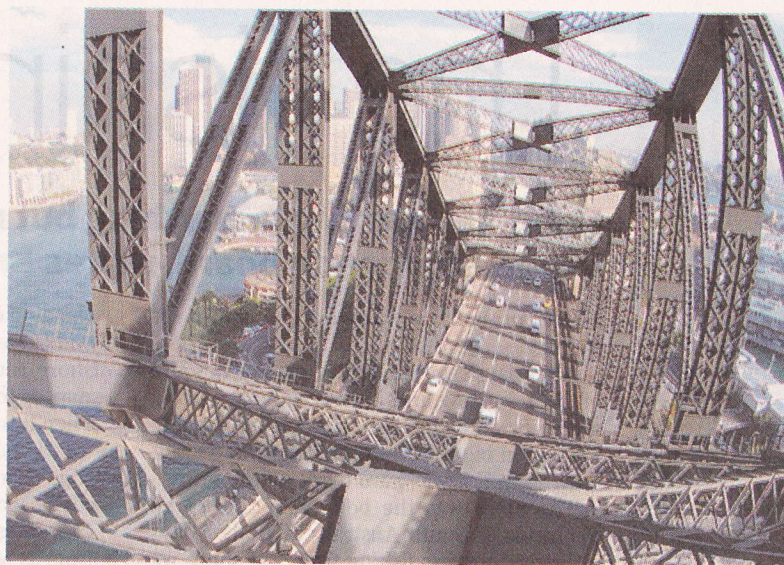
We chose The Discovery Climb, which traverses the lower suspension arch, taking us through the heart of the world's largest (though not longest) arch bridge. Surrounded by steel, our guide Dean told us about the foresight of bridge designer J.J.C. Bradfield, the skill of engineers and the courage of construction workers.

There are no ladders, just easily paced steps interspersed with cat-

walks. There's a little ducking and weaving, but that enhances the feeling of discovery. It wasn't as physically challenging as we expected and there were plenty of rest stops for photos, so no one felt puffed, though the children requested a chocolate fix immediately afterwards.

The unexpected highlight for me was the beauty of the bridge's structural symmetry. Inside the graceful curve of the famous Coathanger it's all angular; a maze of rectangles, triangles and diagonals, like a giant Meccano construction. And I loved seeing the harbour's luminous green water honeycombed beneath my feet on a short mesh staircase under the bridge. I really was walking on water.

Emerging at the top of the arch, 134m above the harbour, was a highlight for all of us. Sydney Harbour is simply stunning from on high. Speedboats below us left elegant timber schooners and sleek racing



Structural symmetry: Breathtaking views of Sydney and its harbour through the lower spans of the city's Harbour Bridge

yachts in their wakes, while jet boats sent their passengers into a spin.

Overcast skies couldn't dampen Luna Park's welcoming grin or the elegant Opera House sails. Shafts of late afternoon light filtering through cloud cover backlit tufts of cloud and illuminated the western harbour with an ethereal glow.

BridgeClimb won best major tourist attraction for the sixth time at the 2007 New South Wales Tourism Awards and has escorted more than two million climbers since 1998.

Following our briefing and breath test (blood alcohol must be under 0.05) we were kitted out in matching jumpsuits with hats, handkerchiefs and jackets attached. You can't carry any loose clothes, phones or cameras

in case they fall. The guides take photos to buy later, though a free group photo is included in the price.

We were tethered to a safety line throughout the climb, unlike construction workers back in the late 1920s and early '30s before occupational health and safety concerns. Workers were lifted atop swinging beams to the top of the bridge and rode the crane hook back down. Men balanced on girders catching white-hot rivets in buckets of sand — up to 10,000 rivets fell into the harbour.

Travelling over the bridge later, we spotted other climbers silhouetted at the summit. "We've been there," we boasted. It was a great family feeling.

The writer and her family were guests of BridgeClimb Sydney.

SYDNEY

GO BridgeClimb, 5 Cumberland St, The Rocks, Sydney. Call (02) 8274 7777. There is four-hour metered parking in Cumberland St and parking stations nearby (allow plenty of time if there is a cruise liner in Sydney Cove). Catch a ferry, bus or train to Circular Quay.

CLIMB The Discovery Climb takes 3½ hours, with regular departures throughout the day. Weekday climbs cost \$179 for adults, \$109 for children 10 to 16 years. Weekend climbs cost \$199 for adults and \$129 for children. Prices increase for twilight and dawn climbs, and peak season rates apply from December 26 to January 9.

NEARBY Pylon Lookout, South East Pylon, Sydney Harbour Bridge, call (02) 9240 1100. Historical information and displays on the bridge's construction and opening and memorabilia from BridgeClimb founder Paul Cave's personal collection. Open 10am-5pm every day except Christmas Day. General admission (13 years and over) \$9.50, seniors \$6.50, children eight to 12 years \$4, children under seven years free.

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