

Diary of a Quarantinee

DAY 1 Wednesday

At Darwin Airport I line up with other travellers, all of us spaced a metre or so apart, some wearing masks. It's like landing in a foreign country. Finally at the official window I'm inquisitioned: Where exactly was your departure point? Do you have a cough or cold? Are you able to isolate for fourteen days? I show my proof of residence. Fortunately I'm allowed to isolate in my small unit, where I live alone.

DAY 2 Thursday

Isolation soon turns into mandatory quarantine. In blissful innocence of the ever-changing rules, I go for a twilight walk along the lush foreshore, and purchase a pop-up pizza, both forbidden activities. A visit from the friendly Territory Police soon puts paid to that tiny freedom. Now reality hits: no more walks lest I face a steep fine, or worse. I know these are necessary precautions but can't help feeling trapped.

DAYS 3 to 4 Friday to Saturday

I miss the familiar routines of getting up, going out, keeping appointments, coffee with friends. Why bother dressing when there's nowhere to go? Much easier to stay in night attire. I'm introduced to Zoom, and try to get my head around this new digital challenge.

DAYS 5 to 6 Sunday to Monday

I have food anxiety, a sort of FOMO about running out of the essentials, knowing I can't dash to the nearest shop. My grandchildren sometimes pay me a quick visit. We talk at the decreed distance through a locked screen door. They bring me supplies of food, medications, and tonic water. I try not to add too much gin to my nightly glass.

DAY 7 Tuesday

A week in quarantine. My body misses its exercise routine. Online yoga from Darwin Yoga Space is a gift that saves me from complete decadence. My world is confined to the parameters of my small unit, which I keep cleaning and tidying with relentless monotony verging on OCD.

DAYS 8 to 10 Wednesday to Friday

I begin to see advantages in my enforced isolation. As a confirmed introvert, it's a relief not to interact with all & sundry. At last I have time, that precious commodity, to work on the manuscript of my novel. Only I don't. Knowing I have no excuse for 'getting on with it' makes doing any real work harder. Or is it the guilty pleasure of having longed-for time to myself that stops me revelling in my solitude?

DAYS 10 to 11 Saturday to Sunday

Weekends are no different from any other day. I long to go out, hang out at the markets, if only any were open. A strange restlessness besets me; a kind of guilt for being cut off from nearest and dearest, even though this is out of my control.

DAYS 12 to 13 Monday to Tuesday

On the whole, I'm adjusting to this strange lifestyle. Dare I say I'm quite enjoying it? Life is simpler, without the daily pressures of appointments and obligations. I can have icecream for dinner and go to bed at midnight. I have control of the remote. What's not to like?

DAY 14 Wednesday

I'm free! I should feel jubilant. Instead, I'm nervous. Do I really want to be part of the madding crowd? Do I want to wear actual clothes again, turn up for boring appointments, struggle to get myself from A to B? This is my ideal life, I realise. I think I'll stay in quarantine forever,