

Singapore by Tony Charman

Our outward journey to Australia was a long one and so we decided that a break on the way would be sensible. Most of the party opted to stop for two nights in Singapore, although half a dozen intrepid souls chose Hong Kong as their stop over instead.



After a long flight it is always nice to be greeted by a smiling face, so the sight of Colin (our Exchange Director who had preceded us) was a welcome one when we eventually arrived at Singapore airport

Singapore was amazing, and not at all what we had expected. We were impressed by its cleanliness, beauty, modern buildings and very friendly people. We visited the Night Safari at the Zoological Gardens; the Botanical Gardens with their wonderful orchid collection; Sentosa Island; the Chinese and Indian quarters of the city AND managed to fit in some shopping and a City Tour. Not too bad for what was supposed to be a two night rest stop!



Friendship Force members from Cornwall and Wales at Sentosa Island

Brisbane by Jennie Dyson

We arrived in Brisbane at 6.30.a.m. to an enthusiastic welcome from our hosts, then off to a breakfast BBQ for the whole group at the home of Ernie and Ruth Southgate.



Beautiful Brisbane

The week's well planned programme included a tree planting ceremony, a coach trip through the Glasshouse Mountains, visiting emu and alpaca farms, walking in the forest, cuddling Koalas, throwing boomerangs and many stops for morning tea and home-made cakes.

The Farewell party, an 'Aussie Picnic' at the home of Maria and Derek down on the Gold Coast, was a great day. Quizzes, games and plenty of food followed by a swim to cool down.

The kindness of our hosts Rhonda and Ian, who made us so welcome in their lovely home, was the most memorable part of the visit. Ian's dry wit made it all such fun; I enjoyed the garden with its lemon and grapefruit trees and many unfamiliar plants. The blue haze of the Jacaranda trees in full flower was really spectacular.



Hot work by our hosts

Wellington by David Dyson

Wellington, our second venue, is known as the windy city and after our Mystery Day Out with the Vintage Car Club, we could say **wet** and windy. Our hosts insisted we wear warm clothing, hat and gloves and we realised why when we saw the 10 lovingly maintained cars which were to be our transport for the day.



F F Wellington member Bruce Hutton with one of his beautiful vintage cars

We visited the capital's government building with its earthquake protection and were fascinated by the timber houses built on the steep hillsides around the city. The visit to the Marae, the beautifully carved and decorated Maori meeting house, where we were entertained by the little Maori children, was an insight into their culture.

After our stay with Judith and Brian, our hosts, we felt we had known them for much longer than one hectic week. The pot luck suppers gave us an opportunity to meet other club members who all showed us such kindness and generosity. When we left to catch the ferry to the South Island, there were tearful farewells, having made many new friends.

Christchurch by Maureen Bennett

Our journey from Wellington took us across the Cook Straits by ferry, to Picton in the South Island, then by rail along the coast to Christchurch. The views were spectacular - the snowy peaked mountains, the fields of sheep, the road and rail track running parallel to the sea and the surfers and seals!

It was such fun meeting up with familiar faces in Christchurch and remembering the good times we had had together. After our meeting with the Mayor on the first day we carried out a tree planting and picnic and went sightseeing with our hosts.



I went up to the Banks Peninsula to look down on Littleton Harbour- the place where the settlers from the UK landed in the 1830's on their way to the Canterbury Plains and Christchurch.

Our week was packed with exciting trips, a coach trip to Akaroa where we boarded a catamaran to see seals, penguins and Hector dolphins.

Also a visit to Hanmer Springs, where we lay in hot thermal pools and looked at the mountains.



Church at Akaroa

Christchurch (The Garden City) is an excellent centre with the River Avon flowing through it and a cathedral designed by John Loughborough Pearson, the architect of Truro Cathedral.



A Christchurch tram

The massed combined 'choir' of FF Christchurch together with FF Cornwall and FF Somerset joined with us at the farewell party in a rousing chorus of Auld Lang Syne.

The South Island Tour by Tony Charman

"Ah! Now.... excuse me ..."

I wonder how many years it will be before we forget the sound of Alistaire (our Friendship Force mentor and guide) as he politely requested our attention before pointing out yet another sight, or imparted another snippet of interesting information as we drove through the South Island scenery?

And what a lot there was to see and learn about! Varied scenery round every corner - from the flat, wide open spaces of the Canterbury Plain, through fern filled original native woodlands, to the wonderful mountains and glaciers of Fiordland. New Zealand is a **very** beautiful country and we had a grandstand view as our excellent driver Brian ferried us from breathtaking view to the next.



Brian & Alistaire - What a team !

The highlight of the tour must have been our day at Milford Sound where (despite an average DAILY rainfall of one inch and up to twelve inches on individual days !!) we had clear blue skies for the boat trip and, for some of us, a flight back over the mountains, waterfalls and glaciers of the Fiordland National Park.



Milford Sound - WOW !!

Rarotonga by Judy Bosanko

Our final stop was an all too brief visit to Rarotonga. This beautiful little island provided a very welcome break where we could at last draw breath after the non-stop activity of the previous four weeks. Our hotel was right on the beach, the rooms overlooking white coral sand. We saw huge rolling waves breaking safely and spectacularly on the reef; large tropical fish that nibbled your toes, palm trees and very friendly natives. We forgave the weather for being just a little breezy and sometimes cloudy - everything else was super.



The view from our balcony - paradise

We visited the local church on Sunday to listen to the service in Island Maori and hear the beautiful harmonies as the islanders sang their hymns. One or two intrepid souls hired bikes to pedal the 32 miles round the island whilst others of us were content to take the bus or just simply 'veg out' on the glorious beach. On our last evening we were sitting in the hotel lounge and watching the television whilst waiting for the bus to take us to the airport when the Rarotonga news came on - with pictures from England showing the flooding !!! We were finally going home and it seemed a long, long way away.