

Rotary Friendship Exchange between District 7010 Canada and District 9520 Australia.

District 7010 Rotarians participated in a Rotary Friendship exchange with District 9520 South Australia. The trip to Adelaide, South Australia for most of us, took us from Toronto to Dallas, Brisbane and finally Adelaide - a jaunt of roughly 30 hours. Other Rotarians joined us from places like Cambodia. Arriving in Adelaide was very exciting as we were greeted by our first hosts.

The Rotary Friendship Exchange is a Program that gives Rotarians and their families the opportunity to host and visit Rotarians around the world. The participants get to experience other cultures first hand while making lasting friendships.

The primary goal of a Friendship Exchange is to build greater international understanding and goodwill among Rotarians and their families. How else can you get to know someone better than by living in their homes, participating in their daily activities and having them take you on a tour of their communities?

As Kevin de Groot, one of the Canadians stated "To call it a friendship exchange seems to be an understatement. Not only did I make new friends in Australia but strengthened old friendships and built new ones amongst the Canadian crew."

This particular exchange was the mastermind of our District Governor Marilyn Hanson and her classmate, District 9520 Governor Wendy Gaborit. The two met at their Governor training in San Diego. Elizabeth de Groot of the Wasaga Beach Club and Trevor McGuirk of the Mobilong Club in Adelaide South Australia then coordinated the exchange.



21 people from our District participated in this experience. For most of us, it was all so easy thanks to the coordinators. No flights or hotels to book. The whole adventure was planned for us. All we had to do is ensure that our passports were in order. We would be visiting South Australia – Adelaide, the Murray River lands and Strathalbyn/Victor Harbor.

Our first full day was one to get to know our hosts. We spent some quiet time with them, and some of us toured the Adelaide market, museums, Adelaide Zoo and art galleries and other areas of interest getting to know the resident city of our hosts. Our first get together as a group was that same evening at the Osmond Golf club where a delicious dinner of lamb, fish and other Australian favorites were served.

The stay in Adelaide also saw us tour the wineries and markets in the McLaren Vale wineries area of South Australia. We can all attest that South Australian wineries are indeed some of the best in the world. Our first Aussie BBQ was at a Rotarian's farm where we enjoyed great steak and sausage, and some had their first kangaroo sighting. Some of us got a little nostalgic for home as we discovered that this farmer had been gifted a maple tree that grew handsomely in his back yard.



The Canadian contingent and their hosts were honoured to be received by Governor Kevin Scarce (the SA equivalent to our Lieutenant-Governor David Onley) for wine and cheese and a tour of his official residence (picture below).



It was now time to move on to our new hosts in Murray Bridge. Our first adventure here was a bus tour of the Monarto wilderness zoo where we saw animals such as giraffes, rhinos, zebras, chimps, leopards and other animals from all over the world. Some of us had yet to see our first koala or kangaroo. The Murray Bridge Rotary club hosted a multi-club dinner meeting where we were entertained by an amazing story-teller reciting 'Clancy of the Overflow' and a duo singing traditional Aussie songs such as Waltzing Matilda.

No trip to the Murray lands area would be complete without a tour of the Murray River. Our guides took us to some exciting lookouts overseeing fabulous scenery of the river and its surrounding area. The next day saw us taking a boat tour of another section of the river and enjoying the life around it. Being as South Australia is like a desert, the Murray River is considered the life blood of this state.



After an evening social and BBQ of schnitzel, chicken, lamb, and sausage and of course a few sips of wine and a beer or two it was time to move on to the last leg of our special journey in the Strathalbyn/Victor Harbor area. This is the vacation area of South Australia and it was immediately apparent why this was so. The beautiful beaches, the surf, the bluffs, the sights; a perfect area indeed for a restful and relaxing holiday.

For those of us who had yet to make a sighting of their first kangaroo or koala, this area was certainly the place. We saw kangaroos on a golf course, in the fields, in the ditches, off the roads and just about everywhere. We even got to feed kangaroos and pet koalas, a truly remarkable experience.



A tour of Kangaroo Island gave us a wonderful experience as we saw seals up close in their natural environment, we looked at the 'Remarkable Rocks' and the 'Admiral's Arch'. Visited a bee farm and a eucalyptus oil factory. And once again saw koalas up close in their natural environment. These cute little creatures alone make a trip to Australia worthwhile.

Unfortunately, all things must come to an end. All of us including our three host families and Rotarians at large were invited to a going-away BBQ. Hugs and sad and tearful goodbyes were the order of the evening. We did indeed make some great new friends.

The following is from Marc Winegarden, one of the Canadians on the tour and I find his words very expressive of our experience: "Our journey abroad was one of the most incredible experiences I have ever had. Imagine taking everything we like about Canada and changing just enough to remind you that you are on vacation. It was not just our host families but it was Australians on the street, in their shops, complete strangers who treated us as though we had just moved in next door. I hope that when Rotarians of South Australia come to Canada, we are as able to showcase our country and our people as graciously as you did for us."

Thank you Rotary International for the great opportunity presented to Rotarians via the "Rotary Friendship Exchange Program".