

# ***AB EXPLORER TOURS***

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## ***Bulletin – November 2017:***

This edition is being started while I am on Norfolk Island whilst looking at the possibilities of starting Explorer departures here again. There are a number of issues to be overcome and more of that later.

In early June we undertook what probably has been our last departure to the Northern Territory. With complications travelling there due to inclement wet weather in Sydney our flight was diverted to Brisbane with no hope of joining the Darwin flight as planned the next day. To the rescue came Air New Zealand with whom we were flying and aided by Qantas we were able to get through to Darwin the next day from Brisbane, with minimal delay. Well done especially Air NZ. The group took part in a variety of activity including indulgence in Aboriginal life and the way they respect the land and what it offers for their way of life. Pine Creek was a treat for most including the fruit bats and they were to see thousands more on the way to Katherine Gorge where the sheer numbers were physically breaking the branches from the trees. During this time it was sobering to see and learn something of the Japanese damage inflicted in the area during WW2 as we visited some of the sites bearing testimony to those events. A day to Mataranka including a swim in the hot pools was enjoyed. Backtracking to Kakadu National Park for 5 days was an experience and a time of learning in all that it offers. This time there were not so many crocodiles in evidence which was a little disappointing. To conclude it was 4 days in multi-cultural Darwin before heading home for most.

Late June and July into August started our own adventure from Perth to Sydney. First we headed north to Denham where we experienced quite a lot of rain. Pat had a great experience at Monkey Mia hand feeding a wild dolphin and that was on her bucket list to do. From Fremantle it was into a campervan, with friends who joined us in theirs, as we set off for Margaret River and Cape Leeuwin, the most south western tip of Australia, then along the coast to Albany, the starting point for Anzac soldiers heading off to WW1 as the convoy departed from there. This fact is well commemorated there with the Australian Anzac Centre having recently been opened. Further along the coast we experienced Esperance before heading north then east as we started the drive across the Nullarbor Plain which

took 4 days. Some great sights were experienced by the 4 of us. We even camped out in the vans along the road, which is 1153km in length. The most exciting morning was at the head of the Australian Bight where it is possible to see whales. As we headed down the walkways and along the cliffs we started to hear their calls and see the "blowing". It is estimated that on that morning the rangers had counted over 40+ not including calves. An awesome sight indeed, not easily forgotten. From here it was on to Adelaide, then Pat and I continued on our own to Sydney via Broken Hill, Orange and Parkes. At the latter we saw one of the world's largest space radio telescopes. It was an awesome journey for us and allowed us to see many places that had been on our bucket list.

In September another group was escorted by us to the top of the South Island once again. However, at times the weather was not kind to us but none the less we were able to complete all that we set out to do. An increase in gannets spreading along the beach from Farewell Spit was a pleasant surprise. It was good to see the increase in their numbers. The traffic on the inland route was unbelievable at times. (As a note Pat has just travelled that route in the last few weeks and one direction she counted 172 trucks going against them on the day and that despite the railway being open once again.) It was intended that we would come back south via Arthur's Pass but snow was forecast so we came back over the Lewis Pass again.

This departure will operate again next September and 5 places are taken already so if you want to be included on the list for information please let us know to avoid disappointment.

Silver Fern Railcar Tours that I have managed have been enjoyed by some of the readers of this edition and will be repeated again in 2018.

### ***Future Departures:***

**McKenzie Country Stay Put Explorer:** We have not run this one for some years but there has been enough interest to warrant us putting that together again. Based on motel accommodation in Twizel this will in all probability run in March. This will see us travelling to the head of Lake Tekapo towards the Godley River. Another day in the Hermitage area where you can enjoy unguided walks or even consider a Scenic Flight amongst our highest mountains along the Main Divide. Time to explore around Lake Ohau and the Temple Stream and on another day explore the Ahuriri Valley. Also plan to experience off the road sites in the Lindis Pass area. This Explorer will depart and return from Gore with connections from points north in Autumn 2018. Several names on the list now so do not delay to include yours.

**Kaikoura Investigation Explorer:** In recent times several people have asked if we could run a trip to check out what is happening in Kaikoura after the earthquake repair and so on. We would be able to check out the new and repaired State Highway 1 through to Blenheim and also see how the Pacific

Ocean shoreline has changed since the shake. Nights in Ashburton and Hanmer Springs on the way up and back home with 2 or 3 in Kaikoura and at least 1 in Picton or Blenheim. Will be working on this one soon and it will be a winter departure which will also show off the snowy Kaikoura Mountains along the coast too. If interested ring to have your name included on the list.

**Top of the South:** This one has proved immensely popular and will be repeated one more time next Spring. As mentioned earlier we have names already so don't delay in making contact. You will experience Farewell Spit and other places above Collingwood as well as west to Whanganui Inlet, a very remote part of north west Nelson. Including French Pass in the Marlborough Sounds as well, all adds up to a fascinating journey of discovery. We should also be able to travel down the Pacific Coast Highway to Christchurch and then south on the homeward run.

**Tasmania:** Indications a few years back suggested that the Island State departures had run their course but many folk have said that they would like to visit so a departure is being planned for the Spring of 2018. It will be for 16 days including over nights in Melbourne so as to make flight connections easier. It will be limited to no more than 12 people so as to experience an enjoyable time for those taking part. We will arrive into and depart from Launceston and include a route through Burnie, Smithton, Queenstown, Hobart and Bicheno thus allowing us to circumnavigate the island. Of course lots of interesting places in between along with wildlife. Contact us to register your interest.

**Norfolk Island:** As mentioned earlier Allan has spent time on Norfolk checking out the current situation since the Australian takeover and other improvements in the visitor experience. I have been surprised at how things are working out for a handful of island residents but not the majority. Tour operators we use are positive with what is happening in their industry despite huge official problems. On a positive note I found that visitor numbers are increasing especially from Australia and with new ventures starting as well to add to the experience. We would like to offer another 12 day Explorer next Spring or early Summer. The planning will continue but the departure will all hinge on whether the flights from Auckland will restart or not (currently they are planned to cease mid January) so we have to watch that space. The option with travel via Sydney or Brisbane could probably be cost prohibitive and would require at least 2 over nights or longer if we were to include that option. A stay of a few days in either of those cities, on the other hand, may in fact appeal to some people. If interested please once again make contact so you can receive updates on how things are progressing.

Not so many offerings this time around due to commitments (working on Christmas Day with cruise ships in Dunedin) and we intend taking time out next year for ourselves. Trusting there may be something of interest for you. Even if you have made contact for any of the proposed departures please contact us to reconfirm your interest. It will be great to hear from you in this regard.

All the best for the festive season and 2018.

***Pat & Allan***