

Friendship Force of the Sunshine Coast

Domestic Exchange #AUS D119

To: Albany, Western Australia

Dates: 9-16 March 2016

14 ambassadors (four couples and six singles) from the Sunshine Coast participated in a seven day domestic exchange to Albany, in south-western Western Australia (WA), beginning on 9 March. We were hosted by Albany club in eight homes.

The exchange was originally scheduled for September 2016, so in August 2015 I started planning on that basis. As the nominated Albany ED was overseas on holidays, my initial contact was with the Albany President; she indicated to me that the club would probably prefer a March exchange. The Albany ED first contacted me on 9 September (from Vancouver), confirming his preference for March. His next email wasn't until 9 October (after he returned to Albany from the US and Canada), when the exchange date was confirmed as mid-March 2016. That gave us only five months for potential ambassadors to plan their trip, including trying to get the best prices on trains and planes.

An added complication was the impending withdrawal, in February 2016, of the air service between Perth to Albany, so ambassadors had to choose between limited land transport options in order to get to Albany from Perth. (An air service was reinstated in February, but this was too late for us to change our plans.)

Because the exchange was now scheduled between the expected hot late-summer weather in southern Australia (Perth and Adelaide had record hot summers) and Easter, it was not practicable to organise group pre-or post-exchange activities. This was unfortunate, as southern WA is a long way from the Sunshine Coast and quite expensive to get to; some of us would have liked to have got more out of our long trip westward by travelling by road across the Nullarbor from South Australia to WA. (We were grateful that we eventually decided not to drive to WA, because it was still very hot in early autumn.)

Detailed planning proceeded frustratingly slowly until February: the Albany ED was overseas until the end of September and holidaying in eastern Australia all of December/January, while my wife and I were away on a pre-scheduled holiday in November.

On 9 February, when we received our hosting details and the exchange program, we could start making contact with our hosts and doing our final planning. At this time, I received our first shock: a large increase in FFI hosting fees¹, for which I had not budgeted. However, I put this worry aside while we planned our trip.

From the time we arrived by car or bus at our meeting point, near Albany's old railway station, at 1500 on Wednesday 9 March, we knew we were in good hands. FF Albany and local venues had been highly organised by Don Titterton, our very energetic Albany ED, who led us through a week of varied and most interesting activities, with plenty of food to keep our energy up.

In order to give a feel for the multitude of activities we engaged in, I have included below the notes I made for my *thank you* address at our farewell lunch.

(Wed) Pot luck dinner at Sylvia Bell's. In accordance with normal FF expectations, danger of overfeeding.

(Thu) Wind farm. Walk along Bibbulmun Track. Salmon Holes viewing platform – turquoise sea, white sand & beautiful striated granite rocks 'flowing down' into the sea. Lunch at Frenchman's Bay – sandwiches & cakes. Walk from Ellen Cove to Atartuk Memorial with our host. More food at Mayoral reception² at Council Chambers. Darrel Radcliffe's chainsaw sculpture drive. Played *500* with our host.

(Fri) Anzac Centre. Sausage rolls, etc, for lunch. Photos taken by journalist from local *Weekender* paper. (We got a half page spread in the 17 March edition.) Tour of old fort buildings and coastal defence guns with

¹ FFI hosting fees were increased by around 40% on 1 Jan 2016 – a huge increase. I had budgeted on AUD70 (USD50) per ambassador, but the new rate (USD70) amounted to nearly AUD104.

² At the Mayor's reception, the Albany ED, Don Titterton, who is also Albany club's publicity officer, asked me if anyone could speak about the Japan children's humanitarian exchange to the Sunshine Coast in 2014. Fortunately, ambassadors Judi and Glen Gordon were involved with that exchange, and Judi was happy to speak about it to those gathered at the reception. Don also organised for Judi to be interviewed on air by ABC local radio a few days later. She did a great job – quite a star.

a guide with a broad Lancashire accent. Visit to Desert Corps Memorial atop Mt Clarence, with more fine views over harbour.

(Sat) Rest day. Visited two markets. Took host out to lunch in CBD. Shoe shopping for the ladies.

(Sun) Boatshed Markets. Foreshore walk past new Entertainment Centre to Anzac Peace Park. Talk by President of Albany RSL on Anzac Centre and Peace Park. Walk around Lake Seppings. Dinner at Don's.

(Mon) Tour of replica Brig Amity, followed by talk by local Aboriginal elder in Museum. Pies, quiche and pasties for lunch at Ellen Cove (Middleton Beach), followed by Don's selection of games: Tom's Balls and horse racing (both ideas imported from FF Sunshine Coast) and Kubb (a game of skittles). [Sunshine Coast club won the beach games competition; Jack brought home the supersized Albany Fly trophy to show FFSC members at our March club meeting]

(Tue) Headed off for Mt Barker via Porongurups. Enjoyed a short walk amongst tall trees in the bush near Tree in the Rock. Morning tea and tour of Banksia Farm, Mt Barker; magnificent display of a multitude of varieties of banksia. Farewell lunch at Phillip Brook Wineries. Our first rain and a noisy thunderstorm, with impressive display of lightning, this afternoon, but of no consequence to our planned activities.

We left Albany by car or bus on Wednesday morning, after a relaxing, fun-filled week with new friends.

Conclusion

Apart from the hesitant start and the compressed time scale for planning, I enjoyed my first experience of being an ED. The job was made easier by the friendly, cooperative ambassadors I took with me and the very energetic ED and friendly hosts we met in FF Albany.

Comments and Recommendations

FFI Fees

The main disappointment for me was the huge increase in FFI fees (+40% over the 2015 level) demanded for this exchange. For domestic exchanges, it's a pity FFI doesn't set a fee **in local currency** based on the exchange rate at the start of the year and settle for the corresponding amount in USD for **at least six months**, rather than having a fee that goes up and down each day with the foreign exchange market; the present system makes budgeting hard for club treasurers and exchange directors. Under the present system, it's little wonder that some overseas clubs are reported to be organising unofficial domestic exchanges between themselves, outside of FFI's purview.

Lead Time for Exchanges

Six months is not really enough lead time for for an exchange; it makes no allowances for any absences of EDs, unexpected major events during planning, or for the peripatetic lifestyle of many FF members, who like to organise their travels well in advance. By the time the program details were released for this exchange, it was too late to seek additional ambassadors via the South Pacific eFlyer. It is recommended that, in future, no exchange be announced until both clubs have clearly enunciated their availability for the time frame proposed.

Assistant EDs

This exchange demonstrated the need for EDs to be available early in the planning stage – or to have nominated assistant EDs to move things along.

The absence overseas in Aug/Sep of the Albany ED meant that we lost valuable planning time on what was already an exchange operating with only half the normal exchange lead time. His being away for two more months over the Christmas holiday period exacerbated the problem – especially in terms of our members' trying to get better value from a relatively expensive trip to WA by trying to organise side trips and transport to Albany. None of this is to criticise Don himself – we saw what a human dynamo he is, and how well the exchange turned out under his direction – but it demonstrated very clearly his need for an assistant to keep things moving along when he wasn't home. And prepared to take over in an emergency, if necessary.

I didn't nominate an assistant ED because I thought the exchange seemed pretty straightforward. However, I should have done what our club's ED's Handbook advised me to do; I will know better next time. Although I was away only for most of November, had I had an assistant ED, he/she could have been canvassing for ambassadors during my absence and keeping Albany apprised of likely numbers to host. And, of course, an assistant ED would have been prepared to take over had I been incapacitated at any time.

Tony Sayer

Exchange Director #AUS D119