

**Geelong Australia Gathering,
18 to 27 February 2019**



Twenty wonderful 5W women from 7 different countries came together in Geelong, Australia for 10 days of friendship, good times, laughter and fun in the sun. What a wonderful time we all had, the first seven days were spent in Geelong staying in 2 bedroom cabins in the Discovery Caravan Park on the lovely Barwon River frontage with its walking and biking trails. Each day was a delightful adventure.

Day 1 was all about settling in and meeting and learning about each other. Janifer and Sharon, the Gathering Organisers warmly welcomed each woman personally and then went on to work very hard each day to deliver the very best Gathering experience they could. Local 5W women also contributed their energy and expertise, joining us when they could.

Day 2 had a leisurely start and then we were off in our two buses, with Janifer and Sharon as drivers, to explore the Geelong waterfront and gardens, the sun was shining so we were soon out of the bus and enjoying a leisurely walk along the bay. After a delicious lunch, we were off down the Surf coast highway to Torquay to experience the vistas of rolling ocean swells, surf beaches and surfers that coast is famous for.

Day 3, had us on our buses at 8.00am as we were off to Ballarat, a large central Victorian city. Our first stop was the Ballarat Wildlife Park, where we were able to get up close and personal with some of Australia's most famous native animals. From free roaming Kangaroos, to Koalas, Wombats, Tasmanian Devils, the Echidna, to a Crocodile and large displays of lizards. The afternoon found Sharon leading us on a leisurely walk through the beautiful and historic Botanic Gardens to the rather fascinating Tram Museum. A truly delightful day.

Day 4 was spent enjoying a leisurely drive around the Bellarine Peninsula, enjoying the different beaches, exploring the historic town of Queenscliff, and discovering some of the food and wine experiences on the Bellarine Taste trail at the Jack Rabbit and Oakdene Wineries.

Day 5 found us up early and off to Ballarat again, this time to experience Sovereign Hill, Australia's foremost outdoor museum, which re-creates Ballarat's first ten years after the discovery of gold in 1851, when thousands of international adventurers rushed to the Australian goldfields in search of fortune. This was a real stepping back in time moment – from the hustle and bustle of Main St where costumed goldfield characters entertained and were happy to pose for a great photo, (including Sharon, who, in her day job, coordinates the volunteers at Sovereign Hill) to the Red Hill Diggings where you can pan for real gold and it's yours to keep!. Sharon had organised a special event for us, a talk titled the 'Undercover Story' where we learnt all about women's fashionable underwear in the 1850's. Ladies we have it so easy now, what a nightmare getting dressed back then was. Day 6 had us attending the Pako Festa, Victoria's biggest free celebration of cultural diversity, one street, 43 cultures, a fantastic street parade, a smorgasbord of food stalls featuring foods from around the world, exhibitions of culture and crafts, folk dancing, six world music stages. Wow what a day!. People danced, they sang, they participated, and they laughed and enjoyed.



Day 7 was our free day and last day in Geelong, a small group of ladies caught the train to Melbourne and enjoyed a morning walking tour of central Melbourne including its laneways and covered arcades. A Melbourne based 5W member led the tour. Others explored Geelong, including the Art Gallery, Wool Museum, Library and Botanic Gardens. Day 8, a glorious sunny day found us packed and ready to roll out at 7.30am, off down the Great Ocean Road, one of the world's most scenic drives to Warrnamboo, where we would stay for the last 2 nights. Visiting Aireys Inlet, lunch in Apollo Bay then inland through hills and farmland to reach the coast at Port Campbell.

Day 9 started with a communal pancake breakfast then on the bus to visit Tower Hill, an inactive volcano. We drove down into the crater, which is now a wildlife reserve, then drove to the charming fishing village of Port Fairy.

Day 10, our last day together as we loaded our bags on the bus and journeyed back along the Hamilton Highway to Melbourne, staying at quaint little country towns for coffee and then lunch. What a wonderful 10 days together, with many new friends made and contact details exchanged, all our lives a little richer for coming together and sharing the Geelong Gathering.

Janifer, Victoria, Australia