

AZAD Trip To Australia

In March 2003, ten AZAD Docents from across the country, accompanied by six family and friends enjoyed a wonderful adventure touring Australia (eight members of the group continued on to New Zealand). Although we ranged in age from college students to senior citizens, we all shared the thrill of seeing koalas, kangaroos, wallabies, pademelons, flying foxes, salt water crocodiles, and a variety of beautiful birds “in the wild”. Our guides and drivers were knowledgeable about the fauna, flora, history, and geography of the areas we visited. The trip covered a cross section of Australia including the cosmopolitan cities of Sydney and Brisbane, many beautiful national parks, waterfalls, rainforests, the bush, and the Great Barrier Reef. We visited the Taronga Zoo in Sydney where their docents gave us a private tour and Wild World near Cairns where we had the chance to hold a koala in our arms. Snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef was fun for some, while others stayed dry and viewed the reef from inside a semi-submersible. It is almost impossible to pick out one highlight as each day was filled with terrific adventures shared with a new group of friends. For many of us, meeting Gaylene Parker, “the wombat lady” was an experience we will never forget. Gaylene and her husband, Rob, have opened their home and hearts to orphaned wombats. Their property in New South Wales was covered with a variety of enclosures housing wombats of different ages. Pouches, created from heavy canvas bags lined with soft cotton fabric, provided a safe haven for these tiny marsupials. The youngest wombats were kept in indoor cages and were bottle fed by Gaylene as often as every 2-3 hours round the clock. We learned that in Australia, private citizens can legally care for wild animals and people have become involved with providing foster care to help native animals, such as the wombat, survive. Wonderful memories of Australia and meeting many new friends are recalled each time I look through photos or get email from someone in our group. We’re already talking about a reunion. AZAD trips are great! I can’t wait to travel with AZAD again.