

Sample itineraries for small group or family getaways

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For most of us, particularly as our retirement years increase in number, we treasure more and more those wonderful memories and friendships that were formed throughout our teaching careers. How great it is then if we are able to continue to get together with 'old' colleagues and further test those memories, as we share good stories and even better company and experiences and food and refreshment.

This article describes a number of reunion getaways undertaken by a particular group of well-retired teachers and their spouses but the locations, venues and activities might also be of interest to any small group or family or couples or individuals.

My first teaching appointment was to Ashfield Boys High School in 1973 and now, nearly 50 years later, a group of teachers and their spouses from that school continues to get together twice each year – once for a lunch in the city (Sydney) and once for a three-day getaway at different locations within a reasonable driving distance from Sydney.

Earlier itineraries for our getaways were based in locations that could offer a range of local attractions and places of interest and activities that were not too far away from our accommodation. In more recent years, particularly as energy and mobility issues have increased in proportion to our enjoyment of food and refreshment, we have sought out locations and venues where any daily excursions are kept to a minimum. To avoid the weekend crowds, we usually book for a Monday arrival and Wednesday departure.

Venues and locations are named and highlighted in the following summaries, not simply to outline the itinerary but to particularly offer positive recommendations for what we have experienced on each occasion. I have not attempted detailed summaries for those years where our excursions were organised by a different couple.

March 2020 – Pokolbin, Hunter Valley

Our group comprised seven couples and we sought out a venue that was quiet and secluded, yet close enough to various wineries, cafes and shops.

The **Thistle Hill Guesthouse** in Hermitage Road perfectly met our needs. The main facility comprises a single complex with eight private ensuite rooms. There is also a separate cottage with two additional ensuite rooms and kitchen, dining and lounge facilities. A lovely stand-alone breakfast room is located alongside the pool area and our hosts Donna and Stuart provided the most wonderful breakfasts each day as well as excellent service and advice throughout our stay.



Thistle Hill Guesthouse – main building

Our first meeting place on the Monday was over an excellent lunch at the **Enzo Café** in the grounds of the Peppers Creek Village. Although Thistle Hill does not have a restaurant, our hosts offered to cook us some delicious pizzas for dinner to supplement our afternoon Happy Hour refreshments.

On the Tuesday we had pre-booked a morning wine tasting session at the **Piggs Peake Winery** which was only a two-minute drive or 20-minute walk from Thistle Hill. Directly over the road was the **Ironbark Hill Brewhouse** where tasting paddles could be purchased by those so inclined.



Binnorie Dairy Lunch

Lunch was then next door to Piggs Peake at the **Two Fat Blokes Deli-Café**. Much-needed exercise was provided for some of us by the walk back to our accommodation.

An excellent dinner (a group set menu) was enjoyed at the **Blaxland Inn** in Broke Road (15-minute drive) and they provided the bonus of a courtesy bus service for both pick-up from and return to our accommodation.

On our final day, morning tea was enjoyed at **Cocoa Nib** in the grounds of Keith Tulloch Wines at the corner of Deasys Road (five-minute drive). Here you can purchase the most amazing range of artisan chocolates and pastries to savour with your coffee and to take home. Our final destination before departure for home was cheese tasting and lunch at the **Binnorie Dairy** in Lodge Road, Lovedale.

March 2019 – Terrigal

Our accommodation in **Terrigal** was the reasonably priced **Sails Serviced Apartments** in Maroomba Road, not far from the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Our group of 13 first met for an enjoyable lunch on the Monday at the **Breakers Country Club** in Dover Road, Wamberal.

Although we had organised no particular activities for our first day, our apartments were close enough to the beach and the main shopping area to provide a range of options that included swimming, walking on the beach, shopping, afternoon coffee, climbing the Skillion or chats by the seaside.

Other options to consider were a 40-minute drive to the **Norah Head Lighthouse** or a 15-minute drive to the **Ken Duncan Gallery** in Erina Heights.



Terrigal Beach

The apartments had a convenient outdoor BBQ area that was large enough to accommodate our afternoon Happy Hour gathering and there were plenty of casual dining options available for dinner including the **Florida Beach Bar and Terrace** on the lower ground level of the Crowne Plaza Hotel.



Avoca Beach Picture Theatre

The apartments provided basic cereal, milk and juice in each kitchenette or, as an alternative, it was just a short walk to the **Aromas Café** under the Crowne Plaza for breakfast.

On the Tuesday morning, we had pre-booked tickets to the **Avoca Beach Picture Theatre** which was a quirky and old-fashioned (1948) venue and this proved very popular with a viewing of *Stan and Ollie*.

A two-minute walk at the end of the movie took us to the **Avoca Beach Seafoods** for lunch and a great view over the ocean.

Before heading back to our accommodation, we drove the short ten minutes to the **Captain Cook Lookout** in Copacabana where there were spectacular coastal views.



Edogawa Japanese Gardens

We had pre-booked our dinner at **The Grand Pavilion Indian Restaurant** in Church Street, a short two-block walk from our apartments. The food and service there were exceptional.

On departing our accommodation on the final day, we drove (20 minutes) to the **Gosford Regional Gallery and Edogawa Japanese Gardens** in Webb Street.

After morning tea at the on-site **Top Point Café**, we enjoyed pre-booked guided tours of both the gallery and the gardens and these were of great interest.

Our farewell lunch was also at the Top Point Café.

March 2018 and March 2017 – Noonaweena Retreat, Kulnura

Yes, we were so impressed with the **Noonaweena Retreat** in 2017 (nine couples) that we immediately rebooked and returned in 2018 (again with nine couples).

The Noonaweena 100-acre secluded property is an hour's drive north of Sydney along George Downes Drive, Kulnura. This unique boutique retreat has magnificent views over the Yengo National Park and features two distinct houses or lodges as well as a separate cottage and an executive treetop suite.

With a total of 16 bedrooms available, we were able to utilise nine rooms within Biram House and Boronia Cottage and had exclusive use of all the associated facilities which included kitchen, dining, lounge, sitting and conference room and pool and spa and tennis court.

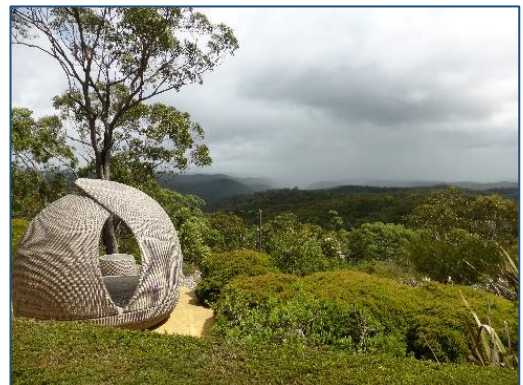
For smaller or family groups, the separate Gymea House has five bedrooms and all its own similar (private) facilities.

Although private catering can be arranged for corporate functions or weddings, Noonaweena is otherwise self-catering. On our first visit in 2017, we brought in all of our own supplies but did arrange for an external chef to provide our Tuesday evening meal. In 2018, we arranged for a Coles delivery of most food items and again arranged for external catering for our Tuesday dinner.

Our Monday get-together lunches were held at the **Mooney Mooney Club** in Kowan Road in 2017 and then at the **Mangrove Mountain Memorial Club and Golf Course** in Hallards Road, Central Mangrove in 2018. Both venues were excellent, with the latter having the additional advantage of being only 10 minutes south of Noonaweena.



The main entrance to Biram House



Magnificent valley views



Pool area overlooking the valley

The expansive and high-class facilities within Noonaweena certainly lent themselves to an atmosphere of relaxation and collegiality, even though there was a fair amount of team work required in self-catering.

We had deliberately chosen a venue such as Noonaweena because we did not want to travel anywhere away from our accommodation. Everything we needed was there – peace and quiet and good company in the most wonderful bushland environment. We had no difficulty spending our time engaged in relaxation, swimming, bush walks, tennis, trivia and the sharing of old stories and good food and cheer.



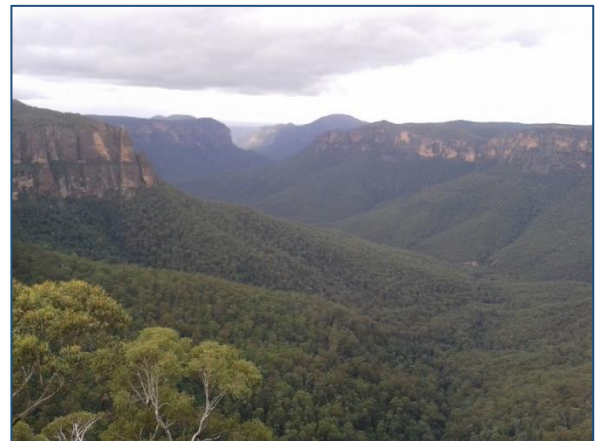
Gynea House

May 2016 – Katoomba, Blue Mountains

Eight couples travelled to Katoomba for this excursion, with our accommodation being the ever-popular **Carrington Hotel** in Katoomba Street.

On the Monday, we greeted each other for a light café lunch at the **Blue Mountains Cultural Centre** which was located just a short walk from the Carrington car park area. This also allowed for an interesting visit to their art gallery and world heritage exhibitions.

After our 2.00pm check-in, we drove (20 min) to the **National Parks and Wildlife Heritage Centre** in Govett's Leap Road, Blackheath. Apart from some interesting displays within the centre, it was only a short distance then to the highly recommended **Govett's Leap Lookout**. For healthy walkers the **Fairfax Track** is a 2.2km circuit which would require a good hour. To break the journey back to our accommodation, we stopped in the **Blackheath town centre** and also at the **Evans Lookout** for a different view of the expansive valley.



Govett's Leap Lookout

Traditional Happy Hour was held in the Billiards Room seating area and our dinner was just a two-minute walk from the hotel at the **Station Bar and Wood Fired Pizza** restaurant in Bathurst Street. The venue had a separate restaurant room away from the main bar area and their gourmet pizzas were excellent.

Tuesday morning provided free time to explore the local shops and our members spread their custom between a number of different venues which included the **Paragon Café** (over 100 years old – but now closed), the quirky **Yellow Deli** for coffee, the **Unique Patisserie** for coffee and cakes (all in Katoomba Street) and the **Carrington Cellars and Deli** behind the Carrington which has a 'crazy' selection of just about everything.

A five-minute drive then took us to the popular **Scenic World** at the corner of Violet Street and Cliff Drive. Activities here included the Skyway, Cableway, Walkway and Railway. The walkway at the base of the cableway or railway is highly recommended and either a part or the whole of the 2.4km boardwalk circuit can be done at your leisure. A good lunch was had at the **EATS270 Café** within Scenic World, so named as it is spectacularly located 270m above the Jamison Valley.



The Skyway

We had arranged a special afternoon activity in the form of a visit to the **Tarella Cottage Museum** – Hobbys Reach Research Centre in Blaxland Road, Wentworth Falls. Our booking included an exclusive tour of the 1890s cottage hosted by welcoming members of the Blue Mountains Historical Society. This delightful visit included the tour with excellent historical information and a wonderful afternoon tea to finish.

This active day concluded with dinner at **The Old City Bank Brasserie** which was thankfully located just at the bottom of the hotel driveway. At the time, this two-course dinner was included as part of the hotel accommodation package.



Valley views

On our final morning, we drove to **Leura Mall** where there seemed to be an endless variety of shops to visit. These included the Tea House, Gifts-n-Things, Bijou Jewel of Leura, Bakehouse on Wentworth, Leura Toy Store, Megalong Books and the Leura Candy Store.

Continuing one of our busiest annual excursions, we then arrived at the **Everglades Historical House and Gardens** in Everglades Avenue, Leura. These multi-levelled grounds were beautiful to view and wander. At the lowest level we found the Historical House which was also the **Tea Room** which we had booked for our farewell lunch. The catering is managed by volunteers and the lunch proved to be excellent.

March 2015 – Newcastle

For many of us it seemed like decades since we had travelled to Newcastle for a stay and our seven couples were thrilled with what we then found. Some things were familiar but so much more had changed.

Our first day on this occasion was a Tuesday and we met for our greeting lunch at the **Grain Store Craft Beer Café** in Scott Street and were impressed by both the range of food choices and also the many selections of craft beers. This venue was only 300m from our accommodation which for this trip was the **Quality Hotel Noah's on the Beach**.



Newcastle Foreshore

After check-in we travelled the short distance to **Fort Scratchley** in Nobby Road for a planned tour only to find that it was not open on that day. Here was a lesson for all organisers or trip planners – always check carefully the operating days and times for attractions and restaurants.

Our usual Happy Hour was followed by an excellent dinner in **Jonah's on the Beach** restaurant within the Noah's Hotel.



Newcastle's Famous Tram

On our second day we enjoyed breakfast at Noah's and later found good coffee as we walked along the beach area close to the hotel. We had then pre-booked a unique tour on the **Newcastle Famous Tram** which was a replica of one which had operated in Newcastle in 1923. The 75-minute tour usually departs from Queens Wharf but we were fortunate that the driver offered to pick us up from the hotel. The tour included local beaches, King Edward Park, Strezlecki Lookout, Honeysuckle Foreshore and commentary (and now also includes a stop at the Anzac Memorial Walk). This was a lot of fun.

Lunch was at the harbourside **Honeysuckle Hotel Bistro** at Wharf C on Honeysuckle Drive. There was plenty to see nearby along the foreshore and we also visited the **Newcastle Museum** in Workshop Way.

Dinner on this second night was at the **Paymasters Restaurant** in Bond Street in the historic East End of Newcastle. The restaurant was housed in a restored 1879 building which at one time had served as the rail workers' Paymaster Office.

We had an open itinerary on our final day and this allowed us to revisit **Fort Scratchley** (which was now open) for a guided tour. Guarding the entrance to the Hunter River, and now a museum, this former coastal defence installation has a fascinating history and the tour was excellent. The remainder of our morning was spent catching the ferry from Queens Wharf to **Stockton** for a sightseeing walk around the local streets and a refreshing coffee.

Our farewell lunch was at the **Little House on King Patisserie/Café** in King Street.



Fort Scratchley Guns

April 2014 – Orange

This was one of our smaller group excursions with only nine of our members able to attend. The dates had been chosen to coincide with the **Orange F.O.O.D Week**, which is now an annual food festival that features the Orange region's diverse and high-quality food and wine through activities such as farm gate tours, wine tasting, cooking demonstrations, picnics, dinners and cabaret.



Old Borenore Railway Station

Our welcome lunch was held at the **Duntryleague Golf Club** in Woodward Street and we then checked-in at our accommodation which was the **Quality Inn Ambassador** on Bathurst Road.

An afternoon 20-minute drive took us to the **Borenore Village** where the sights included a heritage store, the 1885 railway station, the 1881 Royal Hotel and the Old Convent. We returned for our Happy Hour via stops at the **Hillside Orchard & Craft Centre** and **Philip Shaw Wines** in Caldwell Lane.

Our dinner was quite unique as we had pre-booked a **Swinging Bridge Food Masterclass** at the **Union Bank**

Bar & Dining in Byng Street. This was personally hosted by the Swinging Bridge winemaker Tom Ward and featured a fantastic three-course meal with accompanying wines. We thoroughly enjoyed Tom's hospitality and expertise and the quality of the food and wine.

Breakfast on the second day was at our accommodation and we then drove the 30 minutes to **Mount Canobolas** where we enjoyed great views over Orange. At the foot of the mountain we found our morning tea at **Miss Daisy's Teahouse** on Mount Canobolas Road and we returned to Orange via the **Borrodeil Vineyard** on Lake Canobolas Road.

We had booked our lunch at the unique **Agrestic Grocer** on the Mitchell Highway. Here there was a range of fresh local produce and shopping and the bonus of the onsite **Badlands Brewery**, **Second Mouse Cheese Company** and **Pig in the House** wines.

For the afternoon, our group made individual selections from a range of possible attractions and activities which included the Visitor & Information Centre, Orange Botanical Gardens, Cook Park, Regional Gallery and Library, A Slice of Orange (regional produce), Racine Bakery and the birthplace of Banjo Patterson in Memorial Park along the Ophir Road.

We should have perhaps skipped our usual afternoon Happy Hour as we had booked our evening meal at the hatted **Lolli Redini** restaurant in Sale Street. Fine dining indeed, but we were learning the obvious – that we need to certainly cut down on our food and wine intake on future excursions. To the current day, we remain slow learners.

On our final day, after an optional wander through the Orange CBD, we drove to **Millthorpe** which was 20 minutes away. Our morning plan included visits to the **Old Mill Café and Restaurant**, **Golden Memories Museum** and the **Millthorpe Wine Centre**.

Our farewell lunch was at **Gerry's@The Commercial Hotel** in Park Street.

2013 – Mudgee

This trip was organised by another couple and, although it was a great getaway, my notes are therefore quite minimal.

May 2012 – Bowral

This excursion also had a small group of nine who were able to attend. A few of us stopped off at Mittagong for coffee and window shopping before proceeding to our welcome lunch at **Centennial Vineyards** in Centennial Road, Bowral.

Our lunch was in the form of an introductory wine tasting which was followed by a *'Bubbles High Tea'*. This comprised the obvious glass of sparkling wine and then the anticipated variety of High Tea goodies.



'Bubbles' High Tea at Centennial Vineyards

A ten-minute drive away was our accommodation at **Links House** (B&B), a renovated 1928 building which offered 'old world charm' and had everything we needed for a comfortable stay. This was only a five-minute drive from the main shopping streets of Bowral and we spent some time there before our afternoon Happy Hour in the Links House sitting room.

For dinner on the first night, we travelled to **Harveys** in the **Gibraltar Hotel** on Centennial Road.

The second day saw us drive to **Berrima** (15 minutes) for sightseeing and shopping and coffee before driving an extra 25 minutes to **Burrawang**. We enjoyed an excellent lunch and refreshment at the **Burrawang Village Hotel** in Hoddle Street.

Our afternoon activity was a pre-booked wine tasting at the unique **Joadja Winery** on the corner of Greenhills and Joadja Roads, High Range. This was a 35-minute drive from Burrawang but it was very much worth the effort as we were most warmly received.



Joadja Winery

Most of our group later simply relaxed but other possible activities included visits to the gardens at Peppers Craigieburn, Mount Jellore Lookout and the International Cricket Hall of Fame.

Afternoon Happy Hour melted easily into our dinner which was provided at Links House as part of our accommodation package.

Our final morning was scheduled as an easy one with our only booking being a wine tasting at **Tertini Winery** in Kells Creek Road, Mittagong. This was followed with a light lunch in Mittagong before heading home.

2011 – Kiama

2010 – Hunter Valley

2009 - Wollongong

As with 2013, these trips were organised by other couples and, although they were great getaways, my notes are therefore quite minimal.



Some of the Ashfield reunion group – with apologies for the selfie pose

Contributor details

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