

Canada Tour 2016

13 pizzas 12 nights tour, 11 performances, 10m rooms for children 9 planned performances , and chaperones 8 venues for performances, 6 coaches 5 drivers 4 hotels 3 hostings police escorts hostings, 5 nights with hosts

Day 1 - Sunday 24th July



Arrived at Gatwick safely and checked in, with plenty of time to stock up on snacks and drinks. West jet maybe a budget airline but they provide a very adequate free drinks and snack service, and the staff were very helpful. The singers were very well behaved throughout the 8 hour flight.

We met our coach and made our way to the hotel, where everybody settled into very spacious and comfortable rooms. Many of the singers enjoyed a dip in the pool before enjoying a very varied and plentiful buffet dinner, far more food then we could ever eat. An early night was much appreciated by all as we had been awake for over 24 hours.

Day 2 - Monday 25th July



After a very restful night for most, who missed the spectacular thunder storm, we were again provided with an excellent breakfast; we boarded our coach and headed for Niagara Falls and our boat ride on the Hornblower. The weather was overcast and wearing our pink ponchos we were treated to some very close views of both the American and Horseshoe falls.

After this we had a couple of hours for lunch and souvenir shopping before taking the coach ride to the beautiful and picturesque heritage town of Niagara on the Lake, where we had time to shop, including the Christmas Shop. Many singers went to the park, where they listened to a steel band, played on the swings and ran through the fountains, in glorious hot sunshine which reached around 35 C.

Then back to the hotel to pack our cases for and early start tomorrow.

Day 3 Tuesday 26th July



After another restful sleep and plentiful breakfast we left our hotel and made our way to Downtown Toronto. Clear blues skies made for spectacular views across eastern Canada from the top of the CN Tower. Singers had the opportunity to take pictures from inside the viewing platform, outside and also down through the glass floor.



We then took a short coach ride to the beautiful St James Cathedral for our lunchtime recital, where we were warmly received by a large audience, and some singers were able to meet relatives who live nearby. We made a short stop at a nearby supermarket to pick up our lunch before making our way to Owen Sounds to meet our hosts for the next 2 nights, Georgian Bay Children's Choir.



On arrival at the Harmony centre our guest greeted us with gift bags and cold drinks. We had a short rehearsal where the Georgian Bay Children's choir taught our singers an Australian Aboriginal song, and we taught them our version of The Beach Boys "Barbara Ann". We were then treated to a supper where Southend singers could sit and get to know their hosts a little better before going home with their hosting families

Day 4 Wednesday 27th July



Today our Choir members and chaperones had time to spend exploring Owen Sounds with our host families. Most choir members were able to visit many of the beautiful areas in and around this quiet town, including Suable Beach, the Inglis Falls , Indian Falls and Jones falls, the art gallery , Harrison Park, the railway museum, and library.

We met at the Harmony Centre for our evening concert with our host choir The Georgian bay Children's' Choir, where we were welcomed by many locals who visit the centre to listen to concerts. After the concert we treated to a reception of light refreshments before going back with our hosts for our final night in Owen Sounds.

Day 5 Thursday 28th July



This morning we sadly said goodbye to our wonderful hosts in Owen Sound, and made our way to Ottawa our next destination on what has so far been a fantastic tour.

Those in the know will realise that day 5 is significant as generally things tend to go wrong, and today was no different as unfortunately the day started with phone calls and emails letting us know about items that had been left behind with hosts. These will be couriered by our wonderful hosts to meet us in Montreal.



Then approximately 30 miles outside Ottawa the coach developed a technical fault which meant we had to stop in a car park where we enjoyed cakes and snacks provided our hosts whilst waiting for a replacement coach and were visited by the local traffic cops. Once a new a coach arrived we finally reached our hotel and then took a short stroll to purchase our nutritious evening meal (Subway and McDonalds!!!!).

Day 6 Friday 29th July



After an early breakfast we boarded a replacement coach and headed for the Byward Market, where we stocked up on souvenirs, food and drink and an impromptu sing along with a local busker.

With the coach fixed Wendy our driver returned to riotous applause from the children and we were treated to a short sightseeing tour of Ottawa before making our way to the Parliament buildings.



On the approach to the buildings we passed the Holocaust memorial. Security is extremely thorough at Parliament Hill and it took about half an hour to make our way through all the checks. The acoustics in the Rotunda were excellent and allowed other visitors to the parliament buildings to hear some excellent singing from the Southend Choirs.



The children gave an impromptu concert outside to the Police and security staff who joined in with Barbara Ann, We then had some free time to visit the Rideau Shopping Mall to purchase lunch and have some retail therapy before returning to our hotel to prepare for our evening concert.



We then had an extremely long journey on foot across the road to Christchurch Cathedral for our final performance in Ottawa. After the concert we walked the singers back to the Parliament Buildings to watch a spectacular Sound and light show which depicted the Canadian forces involvement in world conflicts. And so to bed.

Day 7 Saturday 30th July

Firstly an update on our concert at Owen Sound, we have been notified by our hosts that the concert raised over \$800 for the Harmony Centre which will help towards the cost of refurbishing this wonderful concert and community centre.

We formed a human chain to move the suitcases from our rooms to the foyer of the hotel as one of the two lifts was out of order and the other was in constant use. The journey to Montreal was straightforward and we were able to stop to pick up some food for lunch on route.



Our concert venue, Christchurch Cathedral is a magnificent building with a very warm and friendly feel. The audience responded well to the choir's performance and we were joined by a guest singer, Olive Murray, a London based soloist who is currently touring the local area.



After the performance the choir were treated to a strawberry and cream reception by the organisers before meeting our new hosts.

Day 8 Sunday 31st July

What a busy day today! After a restful night with our hosts from Christchurch Cathedral Montreal singers arrived to sing in the Cathedral Service. The choirs were very well received and after the service singers had the opportunity to explore the market opposite and buy something to eat.



Then we took a short ride on the coach to St Georges Church and performed our second concert in L'Oasis Musicale concert series , again where the choirs were very well received.



Then on to St Joseph's Oratory, a most magnificent building, with amazing acoustics, where the choir performed for the third time today, directly after the mass to an almost full church. We were then met by our new hosts Les Petits Chanteurs du Mont Royal.

Captains Log Day 9 Monday 1st August

Everyone had a good night's sleep with their hosts and arrived ready for a day of sightseeing.



We started with a guided walking tour of the magnificent St Joseph's Oratory, which included the Crypt Church where we had sung the previous day. The Basilica is a breathtaking building with many pieces of imaginative and inspiring contemporary art. The views over the city were stunning and lots of photos were taken before returning to the coach to travel to the beautiful Parc Mont Royal.



Everyone had their picnic lunches and played in the park before making our way on foot to the Chateau Mont Royal lookout with more breath-taking views over the city. There we discovered a “street piano” and the choir naturally struck up an impromptu performance of Fix You much to the delight of the crowds around us.

After a short walk back to the coach through the woods, we then went downtown to meet our guides for another walking tour of Old Town Montréal. Our guides Jeremy and Michel took smaller groups on two very different tours of the old town. We all walked our socks off today. The coach then took us back to meet the hosting families. Once again we have been privileged to have a wonderful and fantastic hosting choir who will be visiting us next summer.

Day 10 Tuesday 2nd August.

We started the day by saying goodbye once again to another fantastic group of host families.



We set off for the Olympic village for our visits to the Bio-dome and the Planetarium. The singers had the opportunity to walk at leisure through the various eco systems and look at the different flora and fauna.



The Bio-dome was the former velodrome at the 1976 Olympics. The choirs' favourite animals were the beaver, puffins, starfish, jellyfish, the lynx, and the rock hopper penguins. We then took a short walk to the planetarium where we watched a presentation about asteroids from bean bags and planters chairs. Our second presentation was about the constellations and Mars.

Some of the singers dozed as the chairs in this theatre were very very comfortable. We then picnicked in the Olympic stadium.

We changed coaches but not drivers, and drove to Quebec and our hotel for our final few days.

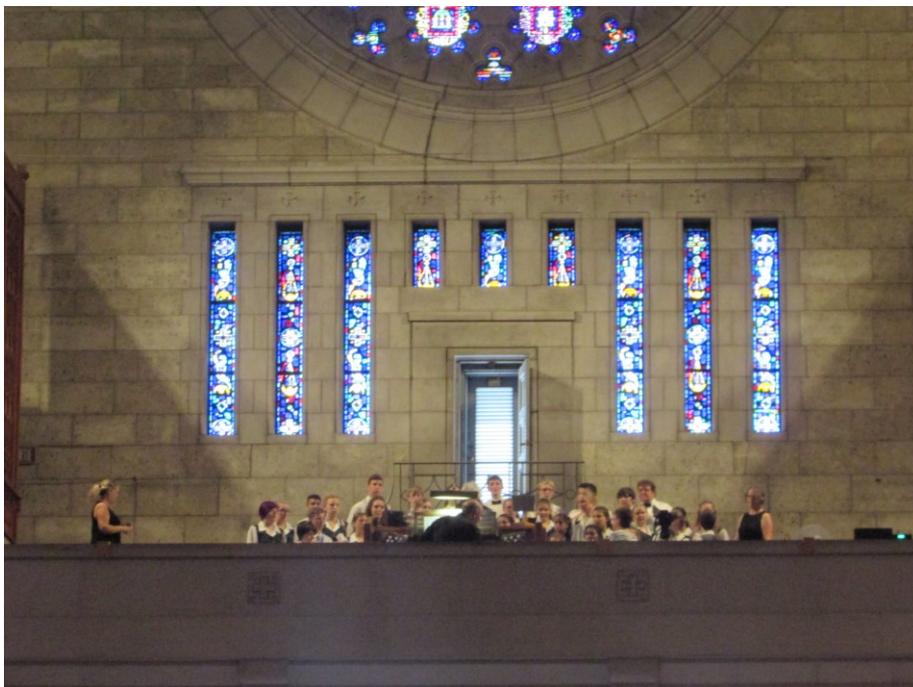
Day 11 Wednesday 3rd August

WENDY SAVES THE DAY!

Today was an interesting day. It started with a hunt for breakfast, which we finally found in the basement.



We then got the coach into Quebec City, a city of mixed history. We went to the Citadel where we saw the changing of the guard. We then had free time to explore the upper town and have lunch.



The coach then took us to St Anne's Basilica, which is approximately 30 kilometres outside Quebec. There have been pilgrimages to the site for more than 300 years. The present Basilica has stood on this site since 1923. We were greeted by very helpful staff and appreciative visitors. We were taken to the organ loft for our performance, where we could marvel at the exquisite painted ceilings and the sheer size of the main basilica. The choir was warmly thanked by the priest for their performance and wished a safe journey home at the end of the tour.

We spent some time outside the basilica cooling down in the breeze, before returning to Quebec to relax in Battlefields Park and Plains of Abraham. Then the hunt for dinner began. We arrived at Laurier Shopping centre which stays open until 9pm, however all the shops and food outlets close at 6pm. A quick call to Wendy the coach driver who nobly returned and collected 38 very hungry singers and 9 very frustrated Chaperones and chauffeured us to Quebec Old town for dinner.



On arrival we found road blocks and were informed, that the opening parade of The New France Festival was about to start. We went on a small magical mystery tour and the coach had to be parked in a small side road until after the parade.

All members of the group managed to get food and caught some glimpses of this period costumed parade. Due to the road blocks we were given a special police escort to make our way out of the old town.

So all in all a different but successful day.

Day 12 Thursday 4th August.

Falls, Ferry, Fountains and Frisbees.

Today was a fun day we started with a visit to The Montmorency Falls, although not as wide as Niagara they are the tallest falls completely in Canada. We walked to the observation platform to get our first view of the falls and then climbed the steps to walk the wobbly suspension bridge across the entire width of the falls. We then took a cable car to the bottom of the falls, where our coach driver Wendy told us two stories, one about the falls, a sad love story, and another about the main bridge into Quebec City.

We then made our way to the Old town Quebec where the singers enjoyed an ice cream before taking the ferry to Levis Island, where many had great fun playing in the fountains, including the older members of the choir and one chaperone. The children and a few chaperones played Frisbee to dry off before returning to the ferry to make our way to the old port to look at the artisan market where jewellery and other arts and crafts gifts could be bought, along with fresh fruit and foods.

Our coach driver took us on a more picturesque route back to our hotel where the singers prepared for our return home and enjoyed a picnic supper of pizza before retiring to bed.