



## THE TWO TALES OF LIBRARY TOURISM

*The library world has long been a global village. The challenges of world travel didn't stop Australian librarians being at the very first international meeting of library professionals over a hundred years ago and it doesn't stop us now. Knowledge is a global resource – Australian library professionals are not unlike our famed flying winemakers, routinely traversing the globe in search of both the knowledge and the skills to manage and interpret it. And yet that's only the view from one side of the library desk.*

The portability of a library professional's skill set is to me one of its most attractive characteristics. It has meant I could make myself useful in all sorts of places (creating a 'library' for a government relief agency involving the use of used manila folders and shoe glue in Ethiopia, answering reference questions in the middle of Smith Street Mall in Darwin for Library and Information Week) and to all sorts of people (patent searches for would-be inventors about to take the world by storm, teaching kids - and their teachers - to interpret the news media, tracking down ingredients for a chef.. ). My list goes on and on and I'm sure yours does too. With travel comes knowledge of different worlds, growing our understanding through contact with other cultures, their histories, peoples and places.

But it's not just about the world we go to see and experience. Library tourism is also very much about what happens when others come to visit us.

ALIA member Leith Robinson is exploring library tourism through her PhD study at Edith Cowan University, focusing on the "convergence of memory institutions". Leith's research shows there is a significant economic and social benefit to be created, particularly where libraries converge with other cultural institutions such as galleries, museums and the performing arts. Our fellow cultural institutions are taking it seriously – Leith reports the inaugural *Partners in Tourism – Cultural and Heritage Tourism Exchange* conference held in Washington last May was attended by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Americans for the Arts and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Leith reports 60% of librarians predict more tourists would visit if their libraries converge. She noted that some converged sites such as Puke Ariki in New Zealand team their library and museum with a visitor centre, boosting attraction, convenience and information provision. Let's face it, libraries can be just the spot for the homesick or travellers seeking somewhere known to be safe. Our libraries are dedicated to helping visitors get what they need – whether that's access to the internet, or something much more prosaic, such as a toilet stop or shelter from the weather.

Libraries in locations with high transient populations often tailor their services and rules accordingly. I can still remember the almost daily occurrence of registering new borrowers in Darwin whose address was a caravan or a boat back in the 1980s. It was this empathy that forever endeared public libraries to me, when they become the safe haven and human 'help desk' Leith's research describes. Our academic and special libraries are also hosting tourists - visiting students and working professionals.

Some of our members have shared their happy snaps and memories of friendships made on the road this month. We hope you enjoy them and we hope your career brings you many such library tourist opportunities. But before you search out your passport and hand the cat over to your housesitter, give some thought to the tourists you may meet right here at home and the experience our libraries may offer them. And bon voyage to all.

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*Note: We will no doubt see Leith's research published in the future, in the meantime INCITE thanks her for allowing us to include the information above. If you would like to know more about Leith's research, contact her at [ltkrobinson@bigpond.com](mailto:ltkrobinson@bigpond.com).*