

This year's annual AustCham Anzac Day bus tour to Kanchanaburi and Hellfire Pass was enjoyed by a full coach load of participants keen to take part in the 100th Anniversary commemoration of the landing at Gallipoli. The tour is a convenient and worry free way of attending all ceremonies and as the Chamber has now been running an Anzac trip for over two decades, the office team are a well-oiled machine assisting participants to make the most of the various commemorative activities.

This year the touring group included old friends who participate each year along with new faces and folk making the journey from Australia. The two day itinerary included a visit to the Hellfire Pass Museum on 24 April to provide an opportunity to tour the museum, to read and learn about the Pass's history, and to experience the peacefulness of the surrounds without the crowds that accompany Anzac day.

That evening the group gathered for an early dinner. Some brave souls stayed up to enjoy a quiet drink, but most were in bed by 9pm wary of the early reveille. The Australian Embassy had advised that because of the expected large numbers who would be attending the Dawn Service for the Centenary commemorations, numbers were to be controlled. All participants on the AustCham tour voted on an earlier than usual departure to ensure access into the Pass, so AustCham staff were relieved when all (minus one) were accounted for, for the 3.15am departure to the Dawn Service.

It was a crowded Konyu Cutting this year which was to be expected, but nonetheless the most humbling of services. Heavy mist encircled as we alighted the bus and made our way down the stairs and into Hellfire Pass. Together with the heavy dampness from a recent downpour, mist, darkness, gloom and the occasional candle to light our way, it was a sobering entrance to a sobering site. Later, the rising heat accompanied by birdsong, 2 minutes silence and the closing music by pipers provided a moving and humbling atmosphere to reflect on those lost in the service of their country.

After a quick Gunfire Breakfast which included the requisite Anzac biscuit and a good shot of rum, the group made their way to the Wreath-Laying Ceremony at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery. This year we were again privileged to hear from Mr Neil MacPherson, one of the last surviving POW's, who gave an account of his time spent working on the railway. His endurance, not only back then, but now into his advanced years, is inspiring. A speech was also provided by Senator the Hon Michaela Cash, representing the Prime Minister of Australia, and the Ambassador to New Zealand after which the crowd of 3000 gathered to swap stories and enjoy a sausage sizzle provided by the Australian Embassy.

As always, the trip was a worthwhile and memorable experience and it was a tired but satisfied group that made their way back to Bangkok vowing to repeat the experience again in 2016.