



August 2025

friendship force

CENTRAL NORTH CAROLINA

FF Denver Outbound

The outbound journey to visit FF Denver was a resounding success. Some ambassadors arrived early. Some stayed longer. Some traveled elsewhere in western USA. But all enjoyed the official five-day homestay.

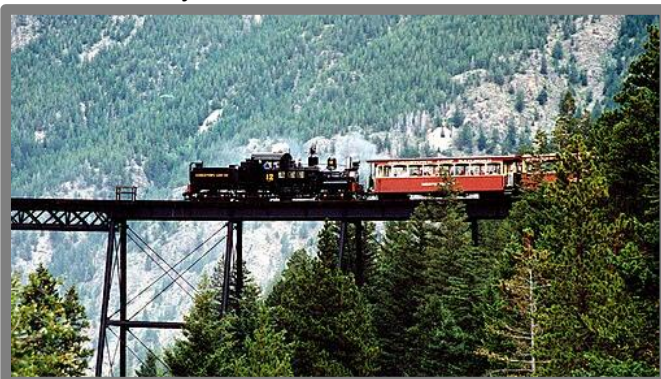
The first day began with lunch at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science to meet the FF Denver hosts and other members of their club. The museum was explored after lunch with participants following their personal interests. Many went to see the dinosaur bones that were recently discovered by teenagers.

On another day the group visited the CSU (Colorado State University) Spur Campus at Denver's National Western Center. This institution brings together research, teaching and engagement activities from the three campuses of the CSU System in a modern-day approach to the university's land-grant mission. Diverse research, demonstration and education programs at Spur promote agricultural literacy and lifelong learning, foster agribusiness entrepreneurship, enhance the health and well-being of individuals and communities, and advance the sustainability of urban and rural food systems.

One day was spent in downtown Denver beginning at the judicial center for a talk by a dynamic judicial educator. After lunch, ambassadors had a variety of choices all within a five-minute walk. These included CELL (the Counter Terrorism Learning Lab), the art museum, the state capital building, the history museum, and more. Some ambassadors managed to visit more than one place! An interesting piece of history was learned at the Indigenous Art of North America exhibit at the Denver Art Museum. Charles John writes that it, "provides a contrasting backdrop for the modernity that characterizes today's Denver. It was the most relaxing item on the itinerary."



Denver Art Museum



Georgetown Loop Railroad

Another day began with a ride on the on

the Georgetown Loop Railroad pictured here. This narrow-gauge railroad was built in 1884 and was considered an engineering marvel for its time. We love our Great Smokey Mountains, but you must admit the views of the Rocky Mountains from the four bridges the train crosses takes your breath

away. A picnic lunch followed the scenic ride, then ambassadors scattered to visit the continental divide, small mining towns, and other interests.

All the ambassadors had a chance to visit Red Rocks Amphitheater. Though there was not a concert at that time, Gerald Forney, the Denver journey coordinator and geologist, gave an introductory talk. There was also an indoor area where there were exhibits and displays on geology, plants, and animals.

How our fifteen FFCNC members managed to squeeze so much into five-days may remain a mystery to the rest of us, but this was a very successful journey.

For Nancy and Rod Edens, this was their first experience on a Friendship Force homestay. Nancy reports, "The Denver group had a splendid array of places to see that I thought would not be interesting. But on the contrary, they were very interesting and well organized." This is part of what makes Friendship Force journeys so rewarding. One often gets to see and do things that are not offered on traditional tours or available to the public.



Judy Greene's wish to visit Red Rocks Amphitheater was fulfilled. Pictured here on the left, she visited with Nancy Crocker and Sue Hoke. Both members of FF Denver. Sue was Judy's home host.



Visiting the Denver Botanic Gardens was a highlight of the visit for some. It features North America's largest collection of plants from cold temperate climates around the world, as well as seven diverse gardens that mostly include plants from Colorado and neighboring states. Two of the gardens are seen above. The lily pond is on the left; the cactus garden, on the right. The bright yellow and red sculpture of a cactus is glasswork by Dale Chihuly. The sculpture is designed to represent yucca. The garden beds are elliptical in shape, giving the illusion of being on a hill.



A Friendship Force journey would be incomplete without at least one group photo. Pictured here are FFCNC's fifteen ambassadors.

First/Front Row: Ray Kiszely

Second Row: Roger Poplin, Nan Poplin, FF Denver host, Danny Crump

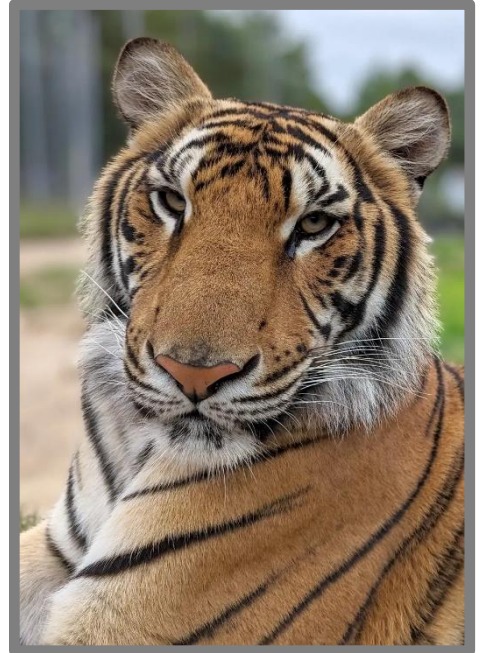
Back Row: Marta Rhodes, Doris Kiszely, FF Denver host, Jane Cauthen, Ralph Cauthen, FF Denver host, Charles John, Marylin Moniquette-John, Rod Edens, Nancy Edens, FF Denver host, Judy Greene, Lundee Amos, Karla Shanahan, FF Denver host

Lions, and Tigers, and Bears.....

Well, maybe no bears, but our next club activity will bring you face to face with a lion, a tiger, and more. No, we are not talking about a visit to the North Carolina Zoo in Randolph County. Many people in the Triad do not realize that there is a small zoo near Burlington – Animal Park at the Conservators Center. The Animal Park's mission is educating people, caring for animals, and advocating for species.

There are more than 60 animals from 24 different species at this zoo, most of which are mammals. Sandra Gramley is arranging a private tour for FFCNC. On this 90-minute tour of the park, we will walk a three-quarter-mile path with an experienced guide and gain an understanding of each species' ecological importance. We will also get to see and learn about each animal's individual behaviors, characteristics, and quirks. For more info about this hidden gem, go to www.animalparknc.org.

The tentative date is Wednesday, October 22 at 10:30 followed by lunch at a local restaurant. It will help Sandra to have an idea of how many of our members would like to join her on this outing. She estimates the cost per person will be \$15 or less. Golf carts are available for those who need them. Please **call, text, or email her** at sangram@triad.rr.com, 336-945-9055 (home), or 336-407-5738 (cell.)



One of five tigers at the
Animal Park

FF Costa Rica Outbound



Monteverde Cloud Forest

Our FF San Jose ambassadors are counting the days until Sept. 5 when they board an early flight out of GSO. Ambassadors have been matched with host families who are comprised of three couples and four women. It is our understanding that none of the hosts speak English. Undoubtedly, our FFCNC ambassadors will all be experts at using translation apps by the time they return home!

Plans for the extended travel are finalized. Those staying a second week will visit the Arenal Volcano area, the Monteverde Cloud Forest, and the Manuel Antonio area on the Pacific coast.

Those participating had to select four "adventures" from a list of 47 full and half day adventures! Seriously. This was the most difficult task. Some of the choices our group made include hiking, bird watching (with a 5:15 AM start!), kayaking, snorkeling, and visiting a chocolate plantation, an Indian reserve, and a vanilla plantation. There should be lots of stories to tell upon their return!

Outbound to FF Kumamoto, Japan



Kumamoto Castle

Definite dates for our journey to Kumamoto, Japan are yet to be determined; however, based on advice from our hosts in Kumamoto, the journey will now take place in the spring. The host club can host ten ambassadors, so if you have an interest in this journey, please let Roger Poplin know that now. This will not be a definite commitment, but it will be helpful to know approximately how large our group might be.

So, why travel to Kumamoto? According to Learners and Makers, a travel company, there are several reasons:

A stunning historic castle. Anime destinations. Iconic natural settings. Delicious food. Any or all of these things might drive your desire to visit Japan. You can find them in popular destinations, but those places also face record crowds.

Whereas on Japan's southern island of Kyushu, Kumamoto has all the good stuff without the overcrowding. Plus, you can get around this smaller city and its beautiful countryside faster and easier than getting around lovely, but gigantic Tokyo.

So, what is some of the “good stuff?” Kumamoto Castle - dating back to 1467, Mount Aso – with the world's largest caldera, Akagyu Beef – tender and flavorful, hot springs, traditional crafts, and more!

2026 Journeys

Dates for the following outbound and inbound journeys have not been determined but keep these months in mind as you make plans for 2026. Please note that the dates of travel to the Florida Suncoast and Japan have changed.

February	Outbound to FF Florida Suncoast club (on the Gulf coast in the Clearwater, Florida area)
April or May	Outbound to FF Kumamoto, Japan
October	Inbound from FF Pikes Peak (Colorado)

As always, each journey is planned and led by a journey coordinator. In the case of outbound journeys, the journey coordinator's expenses to travel for the homestay are covered. In the case of inbound journeys, the journey coordinator receives a \$300 credit which can be applied to a future outbound journey. If you would like to know more about the role of a journey coordinator, please contact Roger at 336-337-4434 or rogerpoplin@gmail.com.