

A CRUISER'S REPORT ON NEW ZEALAND TOURING

Covering:

- *accommodations*
- *activities*
- *attractions*
- *restaurants*
- *transport*

... over 100 companies featured

*"It has long been known that one horse can run faster than another - but which one?
Differences are crucial." -Robert Heinlein / Time enough for love @ 1973*

Written by Luc Callebaut & Jackie Lee on s/v Sloepmouche
Compiled in April/May 2004 and written in December 2004.

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Introduction:

This special report reflects *our own experience* during our several tours in New Zealand in April & May 2004 and is definitely subjective (whoever says he writes something objective fools himself ☺). Not all products and services are equal, but everybody enjoys *experiencing the best quality at the best value!* Too often, people complain about their own poor experiences but do not recommend enough those companies that met their expectations! We would like others to benefit from our experience (local knowledge is always precious!) and to gather great memories like we have. But like they say in financial circles, past performances are no guarantee for future results ... but a good track record generally is a good indicator of top quality!

We hope to avoid any inaccuracies, and with that goal in mind, we emailed a copy of this report to all companies mentioned. Any comments they sent us was considered before editing the final version of this report.

We think it is important to let companies know what you think about their products and services so they can ameliorate, and we can encourage those 'top' companies by recommending them to many friends! *And remember, tipping guides and personnel who really made your experience a great one, are always appreciated and do encourage them to keep up the good work!*

Before making these tours, we *researched* information about touring New Zealand so we could decide which areas and which activities we wanted to experience. As with any country, it takes years to fully discover NZ. But as typical cruisers, our time was limited and we wanted to experience *the best NZ has to offer* without becoming full time residents ☺ We consulted several web sites on the internet, from the official tourism sites to the commercial sites. We wrote emails to many companies (more than 250!) to narrow down what we wanted to do and to *design several itineraries* offering a maximum of interest with the least hassle in transportation.

From the beginning, we were very impressed by the way tourism is handled in this beautiful country. They want our business and are ready to excel in their services. *Do not hesitate to email companies directly to ask them any question you may have;* we found them very helpful and prompt to answer. *Prices seemed to be about 30% less expensive than similar services in Europe or the US for the same, or better, quality product. So why not take advantage? Splurge, and really enjoy 'pure NZ'!*

Several of our cruiser friends seemed to spend too much of their time in the vicinity of the marinas they were in and too little time touring the 4 corners of this interesting country! Why part, wishing to have done more? Why not do it and leave without regrets?

This report, we hope, will give you many ideas and encourage you to discover NZ on your own! Please, feel free, to disseminate this document as long as you don't alter it in any way and transmit it whole, as it is.

Have fun
Luc & Jackie

GENERAL INFO

Transportation:

We studied and compared all different modes of transportation available for travel inside NZ: plane, train, bus, car, camper-van & ferry. We decided to experience most of them to vary our trips.

By plane:

Expensive for the mileage you get (despite some regular promotions), fast if you are in a hurry but does not allow any sightseeing!

Note: to travel outside NZ, we used Polynesian Airlines.

Polynesian Airlines

www.polynesianairlines.com

They offered great service and low season specials to California, Fiji, Samoa & Tonga.

By train:

Tranz Scenic offers reliable transport on three main lines in the most popular areas of the country. The trains are comfortable with large picture windows for sightseeing. Fast Foods available, but there is no dedicated dining car. Some cars have paired seats around tables, some are passenger seating only, as on a plane. Some have a comfortable public lounge area. No beds on the night trains.

Tranz Scenic

Ph: 0800-872 467

www.tranzscenic.co.nz

Unique train journeys on three routes.

- 1) Overlander/Northerner : This route traverses the North Island north/south. Auckland to/from Wellington during the day (Overlander) or the night (Northerner). The brand new, sparkling Britomart train station is right in downtown Auckland at Queen and Quay St. It is also the station for the city buses, and commuter trains. In Wellington, the station is on the waterfront right across street from the Interisland Lynx Ferry terminal that crosses the channel between North and South Island.

- 2) TranzCoastal: Picton to/from Christ Church along the east coast of the South Island offering many coastal views. The train station is within walking distance to the ferry terminal in Picton, but the station in Christchurch is several km from the city center or the airport, and is quite hidden and difficult to find if you drive there by car. Arranging a share/shuttle or taking a metro-bus is the most economical.
- 3) TranzAlpine: Christchurch to/from Greymouth. This route crosses from East to West coast traversing the famous scenic Southern Alps of the South Island (and may be the safest way to traverse the summit during the snow season). In Greymouth the train station is only a few blocks from the small town center, but may be some distance from your accommodation, so get details when you book your stay.

By bus:

A myriad of reliable bus companies offer regular connections and touring to the main centers of interest. There is a formula for every price range and range of service (and even Asian ethnic group!) These are the ones we experienced:

InterCity Coach Lines/ Newmans Line

Ph: 09-913 6100

www.intercitycoach.co.nz

NZ's only nationwide coach network. This bus line has routes to almost every town and city on New Zealand's road system. We booked all our bus travel on a 2 in 1 Travel Pass. (see below). We used this bus line extensively for the majority of our traveling in NZ, because the timetables offered so many possibilities to get us to destinations, and in many cases, JUST in time to make a scheduled activity. Some of the busiest routes are transport city to city only, but many of the routes include interesting commentary by the drivers on history, natural features, and the development of areas on the route. Some of the drivers have that great dry wit characteristic of New Zealanders, and most are very helpful and accommodating. Some of the routes, like those of the west coast and southern routes of the South Island, and from Waitomo to Rotorua on the North Island included stops to visit sites of interest, panoramas, coffee and lunch stops at quaint cafes and fruit stands. In the remote areas in the low season, some buses even picked us up at our accommodations when we requested ahead of time, or dropped us off at activity location that was on the same road. Most buses were new or well-kept, and very clean and comfortable. Surprisingly, most don't have on board toilets, so they try to make frequent enough stops.

Magic Travellers Network New Zealand

Ph: 09- 358 5600

www.magicbus.co.nz

NZ flexible bus transport network for the independent traveler. We used Magic Bus's Backpackers travel system. Used mostly by the young adult, single, traveler-on-a-budget, (Called "Backpackers" in the lingo). This system is very flexible, in that it allows people to make the tourist circuit of all of New Zealand by taking these buses and hopping off wherever they want, and stay however long they want, then taking the next bus to the next location they want, etc. The Magic Bus even books accommodations for you, signs you up for tours and activities, and makes stops at places of interest. It's like having a big brother to look out for you and take care of the bothersome details.

Several multi-pass programs are offered and you can tailor your whole itinerary any way you like. Not all routes are available every day in the low season.

We went with them from Greymouth to Franz Josef making some interesting, fun stops, arriving in time to get up on the afternoon glacier tour.

Magic Bus Company was enthusiastic about supporting and having a presence on www.NOONSITE.com, the most important informational world-wide website for sailing cruisers, and we thank them for helping to keep this great information resource alive and growing. Look for their Gold page on noonsite. If you use them, please express your appreciation for their support.

Kiwi Experience

Ph: 09- 366 9830

www.kiwiexperience.com

Adventure Travel Network of New Zealand This is another company providing the same "backpackers" travel formula as the Magic Bus covering basically the same routes and sights, with some variations in schedules and who they book accommodations and activities with. They have a reputation for attracting the really young (college-age), adventurous, night-life loving, crowds. We took the Kiwi Experience Bus for the 12 hr. day-trip to Milford Sound because they were the only company that included the Milford Deep Underwater Observatory with the boat cruise on Milford Sound in their package. The driver was a wild looking Maori fellow who really knows every turn in that twisting torturous route. He safely and cheerfully got us there and back to Queenstown on a foggy rainy day, and showed us some incredible sights.

By Car:

Numerous car rental companies to choose from, some more serious than others. Better rental prices for longer rental periods. Beware of what is included and not (liability, insurance, assistance in case of breakdown, drop-off charges, ...). Often the great advertised rates won't be so great when you add in those exclusions, and you may be better off with the more well-known rental companies.

We found the combination of renting a car and staying at B&Bs, hostels (called Backpackers) or economy accommodation an excellent combination! Roads are good, but narrow, and there are many 1-lane bridges even on major highways, some even shared by the trains! Driving on the left maybe dangerously confusing for "righties" at the beginning.

Hertz

Ph:0800-501 301

www.hertz.co.nz

Nationwide network of vehicle rentals. We went with a well-known, quality company and paid by our Platinum credit card to get supplemental insurance at no cost, although Hertz's rates include the maximum insurance that you can get in NZ. Be aware tho, that no insurance covers windshield (wind screen) damage; (every kiwi's got a divit in theirs!) Neither does it cover rubber components eaten by the alpine parrots, the Kea (no joke!)

Hertz came through with their high quality service as usual, and even gave us 2 free up-grades!

By Camper-Van:

We really wanted to explore some of NZ by camper but we finally didn't for several reasons (confirmed later on, after our trip). The maneuverability on narrow roads & in town is not as good as cars. The nights can be quite cool, so you are warmer in an accommodation. Credit cards offering free car rental liability insurance often do not cover camper-vans or other special vehicles. The price is much higher than a car. You need to rent a minimum of 5 days, and if you rent Monday at 5pm and return the car the next Tuesday at 8am ... the 3 companies we contacted would charge us 9 days! Each partial day is considered a day, not a 24 hour clock like on car rental. You can only rent and return in Auckland, Christchurch, and maybe Wellington. On top of the rental price, you have to consider the extra government diesel surcharge (by the km) and the cost for any hook-up in camper grounds. The cost to take a camper on the ferry between islands is quite a bit more than a car. This can be a false economy. We found that you could do a long-term rental on a car and stay at budget accommodations for the same, or even less. Campers would be a better solution if you go extensively into the wilderness areas, and sleep off road.

Some friends planning to stay 1 year or more in NZ did buy a used camper-van ... that was a great solution for them wanting to spend a long time exploring NZ wilderness!

Ferry:

To cross between the North island and the South island, you will take either the Interislander ferry or the faster Lynx ferry between Wellington & Picton. The service is well set, good choice of food & drinks, and amusements during the crossing.

The Interisland Line

Ph: 04-498 3023

www.interislandline.co.nz

The Interisland Line runs both the Interislander Ferries, and The Lynx. Frequent ferry service for foot & vehicle passengers between both islands. We did not take a car across, going only as passengers.

The 2 Interislander ferries take about 3 hours to make the Cook's Strait's crossing, depending on weather. The ferry is huge, and has many types of seating areas that you are free to move about in. There is a movie theater on board so you won't be (bored). There are several refreshment areas. And areas to amuse kids, and souvenir shoppers.

The Lynx Ferry – high speed catamaran. This modern vessel provides a smoother ride and gets you across in about 2 1/4 hours. Though smaller, it also has multi-levels, multi-refreshments, and multi-amusements.

Multi transport packages:

The Travel Pass

Ph: 0800-339 966

www.travelpass.co.nz

Nationwide travel passes designed for independent travelers of all ages. With our 2 in 1 Travel Pass covering 12 days of travel by coach and 1 ferry passage, we made our reservations and payment in advance with the Travel Pass company and called them on their toll-free number every time we wanted to modify something. No fee for additions or changes made 24 hrs ahead. Very efficient and pleasant staff. It worked like a charm. We were listed on passenger lists every time, even when we made changes only the day before. You have several weeks to use your travel days. You can also get packages including train and plane travel.

Accommodations

Backpackers accommodation: An unfamiliar form of accommodation to most Americans, Backpackers is a generic term for a budget-type accommodation popular amongst young travelers generally traveling around by public transport with backpacks as luggage. These are the cheapest form of accommodation, originally based on a dormitory sleeping area, bathrooms and showers down the hall, and communal kitchen facilities. All these are still available, but many Backpackers, now offer bunk, twin, or double rooms, and even en suite bathrooms. They all provide your linen, some give towels, some charge for them. Many are full-service facilities and provide Internet terminals, travel, activity, and accommodation bookings, laundromats, storage lockers, BBQ areas, cafes, sundries. Some even have saunas, thermal pools, or hot tubs! Not just young people stay there... we did, and we saw many seniors cooking a meal in Backpacker kitchens! We thought it was a great formula and wonder why more countries don't start Backpackers.

YHA

www.stayyha.com

Budget accommodation. This is part of the internationally known Youth Hostel Assoc. They pretty much originated the Backpacker idea. This membership organization has 62 youth hostels in 25 locations all over NZ, almost anywhere one would be interested in visiting. You don't have to become a member to stay, but there is a discount for members and discounts at stores, activities, and services listed in the members booklet. The best thing about YHA is that there is a certain standard, and we found that all were well kept with modern kitchen facilities and immaculately clean toilets and showers. The places we stayed varied a lot in age, style, and ambiance. They varied in number of beds and size of rooms, whether they had en suite, whether beds were pre-made or linen issued on check-in, or whether they gave or rented or had towels available, but almost all were very tidy and looked as if bathroom facilities were re-modeled frequently. The fun thing about the YHAs was that they were all so different. One was almost like a motor lodge with some private chalets, while another was an old house for Marist priests, another like a ski lodge with sauna.

ACB

www.acb.co.nz

This company has Backpackers in 3 very popular locations: ACB in Auckland, Pipi Patch in Pahia, and Hot Rocks in Rotorua. They offer the Backpackers formula, plus. Each has a Bar/Café on premises or just next door that have theme nights or specials. They have many rooms with private bathrooms, Pipi Patch has a pool and spa, Hot Rocks has 3 thermal pools. All will book travel, activities, organize shuttles, etc. See details in each geographical area below.

Boutique Hotel/ Bed and Breakfast/ Home stay: We could never get an exact answer as to what exactly a "Boutique" hotel was. This is the hot word in marketing in NZ right now. One of the characteristics explained to us was that a Boutique Hotel has no Restaurant. Depending on the particular accommodation, a cocktail hour drink and

appetizers could be included, and all served beautiful, plentiful breakfasts with a wide range of cold selections and toasts, and most would offer hot cooked breakfast with eggs and the hearty New Zealand bacon. All that we stayed at had a couple who were owner/managers and were the most gracious of people and often very interesting people too. Each place has its own charm. What we found is that all have a high level of cleanliness, and seem to be refurbished very often.

Activities & Attractions

NZ offers an infinity of scenic routes and plenty of interesting hiking trails if one enjoys calm and solitude. The roads are well marked and with a good road map you can roam to your heart's content. Don't hesitate to take those unmarked roads if you are in no hurry. One thing we remarked is that local people are very friendly to strangers passing by. Often people will offer local info or road directions spontaneously!

This may be the (as yet) last unspoiled country of so many varied natural beauties in such a small area. The air has a quality that makes every where you look seem like one of those computer-generated back drops for movie sets. The whole country seems fresh and new and burgeoning with possibilities. Visit NOW, it won't last forever.

When you want to enjoy sports activities, you have a choice of dedicated professionals to take you white water rafting, ballooning, hiking glaciers, high-speed or regular boating trips, guided nature tours, and much more. All Kiwi activities have a laugh and a bit of fun in them!

NZ is the land of original crazy activities, like tandem skydiving, bungee jumping, Xtreme freefall, Zorb and others! They offer well organized and safety conscious activities but without the same liability exposure, as in the US! Once you sign the waiver, it's your responsibility to listen to directions!

We chose those activities that we really wanted to try and they were the highlights of our tours! Activities are highly organized, efficiently and safely-run, well-thought-out to provide quick, easy instructions even for novices, with the emphasis on thrills and a lot of humor and fun. We found New Zealanders the masters of high thrill activities...don't be afraid to try something you wouldn't dare anywhere else.

Restaurants & Food

Some friends (mostly Europeans) warned us that New Zealanders preparing otherwise excellent ingredients, could really turn out a mediocre meal. And yes, the tomato sauce (ketchup) was sweet ... but we never had problems finding great places to eat delicious, and many times, excellent meals.

When we prepared our own breakfasts in backpacker accommodations, we had no problem finding bread, pastries and other goods in local stores. Supermarkets and mini-marts opened late. Supermarkets were like in the states featuring bakery, deli, prepared foods, natural bulk foods and extensive cheese and dairy. The B&B breakfasts were, as a rule, copious, offering fresh fruits and hot and cold choices.

For lunch, we often found good inexpensive foods or had no problem making our own sandwiches on-the-go.

For dinner, we went to all dinner/culture shows we could, as those are great opportunities to eat Maori food and to experience Maori dancing and culture. We also went to the most impressive buffets we could find, as those give you a chance to sample all those great NZ products (seafood, venison, ..) that otherwise we wouldn't order on a regular menu because of not knowing what they are or just because single dish dinners don't have satisfaction guarantees! They are also the best value if you like to eat well!

Some nights, we tried to sample all the different ethnic meals, as NZ has a growing multi-racial population: great Asian dishes (Thai, Korean, Malaysian, and different Chinese styles), and great Indian cuisine, for example. Auckland, in particular, is a huge melting pot of cultures.

AUCKLAND CITY

If you come from a marina outside Auckland, you may find the following useful when you go to Auckland to catch an international plane, or if you or friends need accommodations in Auckland:

Transport

Hertz

Ph: 09-256 8695

www.hertz.co.nz

Car rental at airport (may be extra charge to pick up a car). You can also pick up your car at the main office in downtown Auckland very close to the famous Sky Tower, on 154 Victoria St. Oddly enough, office hours are only from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm at the downtown office.

Accommodations

ACB – Auckland Central Backpackers

Ph: 09-358 4877

www.acb.co.nz

Right in the heart of the action in Auckland. Bustling high-rise Backpackers located just off Queen St. near the Sky Tower. This is a major facility from the amount of BP traffic we saw: at least 15 terminals for Internet, full service Travel Center, walking distance to cheap, (and expensive) restaurants, and all the night life of Auckland.

They organize shuttles to the airport and arrange complimentary pick-up for many tours. We had an ensuite double on about the 7th floor with a peripheral view of Sky Tower.

Auckland City YHA

Ph: 09-309 2802

www.stayya.com

The City YHA was an older building and the double room was quite cramped. The layout was a little strange, but all facilities were there, and the staff was friendly.

Auckland International YHA

Ph: 09-302 8200

www.stayya.com

Budget accommodation. This YHA is a newly built facility and more designed to serve the large amount of backpacker traffic in this gateway city than Auckland City YHA.

Both are about a 10-15 min walk to Queen St and the Sky Tower. The kitchen/dining/lounging area was vast. There is a Travel Center, and bulletin boards to help organize people that were going to the airport at the same time to share and thus, reduce, the shuttle bus fare.

The Devereux Boutique Hotel

Ph: 09-524 5044

www.devereux.co.nz

Luxurious Bed and Breakfast in the Remuera district of Auckland. This delightful fully restored historic home from the 1890's has ten "theme" rooms from around the globe, from luxury Master suites, to Executive suites, to queen-size doubles. Theme décor is not wild and kinky, but tastefully subtle. The breakfast/coffee dining is on the patio or in the enclosed "conservatory". Mark and Shannon are your hosts and can guide you to good nearby dinner restaurants, and suggest local activities. Mark has a regular full-time job in the city, but he still has time to put out a great breakfast.

Activities

Auckland Adventures

Ph : 09-379 4545

www.aucklandadventures.com

Auckland Sightseeing, Rainforest, Beach Walks & Mountain Biking Adventures. This company offers a wide range of activities in the Auckland area, or multi-days in farther regions of New Zealand. We took a half-day tour that picked us up at ACB Backpackers and took just us 2 (were not cancelled for low number of pax) to a surprisingly diverse number of activities. The great weather gave us a fabulous view of Auckland and surrounds from Mt. Eden, an inactive volcano in the heart of Auckland's districts. Our guide, Ernesto, catered the tour to us, spending less time at winery visits and tasting, a brief visit to a specialty pear orchard, and more time at Muriwai Beach on the west coast where we viewed Gannet birds and the unique coastal geology that creates a perfect place for nesting, for the formation of sea caves and arches, (the tide was low enough for us to go explore), and directs wind currents for not only gannet flight, but for the rainbow-hued flock of paraglide enthusiasts who were circling, and gliding with the freedom of birds. It's so much nicer to see so much with someone who knows the area, and who does the worrying about the traffic and navigation instead of us!

Stardome of Auckland

Ph: 09-624 1246

www.stardome.org.nz

Planetarium and observatory with shows. The Stardome is a little hard to find if you're driving, and about 20-30 minutes drive from downtown, but the planetarium show was very interesting. The first show, The Sky Tonight was a classic planetarium show with the star projector showing us what we could see from Auckland that time of year. "Fire in the Sky" was a fascinating multi-media show combining the star projector and film that told the story of an actual phenomenon of a fireball explosion that occurred over NZ in 1999, with accounts of actual witnesses and video footage from a tourist. The evening ended with looking at the actual sky through telescopes, notably, the faint wisp of a comet that is coming into visible range.

Trip to explore the NORTH ISLAND NORTH OF AUCKLAND

Since almost all the yachts will make a stop or stay in the Bay of Islands area, they shouldn't miss renting a car (bus service is very limited) and /or taking excursions throughout the area north of Auckland. There is a lot of nature and history and legend here as well as great coastal scenery.

Accommodations

Lodge Eleven YHA - Pahia

Ph: 09-402 7487

www.stayyha.com

Budget accommodation. One of the YHA chain, this was formerly a motor lodge. There is not a great deal of parking on premises, but street parking is safe and easy. This facility had all the features of the YHA hostels, and tour buses picked up here as standard procedure.

Pipi Patch Lodge - Pahia

Ph: 09-402 7111

www.acb.co.nz/pipi.htm

Excellent Backpacker Accommodation in Pahia This Backpackers is part of a network that includes the ACB in Auckland, and the Hot Rocks in Rotorua. The Pipi Patch is a clean, sparkling motor lodge-type accommodation that has all the Backpacker features and more. We stayed in one of the ensuite doubles that even had a kitchenette in a quad unit that houses 4 single-level rooms per building. We drove the car right to the room, no hauling luggage! The room was light and airy with sliding glass door and full length windows. The premises had a hot tub and a café that featured a weekly low cost BBQ with typical food of the area. One of the nicest Backpackers of our trip. As in many places, most tour buses pick up clients right at the door step.

Taipa Bay Resort - Taipa

Ph: 09-406 0656

www.taipabay.co.nz

Resort with Accommodation, Facilities, Activities & Restaurant/café. Located at the south end of Doubtless Bay, this resort has a backyard view of the long beach and the bay. It is a recently built resort, and so every thing is sparkingly new. The suite that we had was like a small apartment with fully equipped kitchen, a dining area, and comfy living room with sliding door patio looking at the beach. The bed room with super king bed had it's own sliding door and patio. They also have studios and apartments. On the grounds, they have swimming and spa pools, tennis courts, and a Restaurant/café serving breakfast and dinner. Internet terminals are located in the reception area, and if you only need a phone socket, each room has access. Taipa is an isolated and quiet place 1 hr north from the tourist filled town of Pahia.

Activities / Attractions

4x4 Dune Rider & Pahia Duck

Ph: 09-402 8681

www.dunerider.co.nz / www.paihiaduck.co.nz

Cape Reinga Tour via 90 Mile Beach & Amphibious Land & Sea Tour, based in Pahia. The Pahia Duck is a modern built vehicle/vessel that was designed after the amphibious "Ducks" of WWII fame. This trip is really a trip! Our Chauffeur/Capt Joe, and Hostess/Tracy were funny and fun with their combination of banter and factual commentary. The Duck is a great way to see Pahia, Waitangi Treaty grounds, roll into the water and "drive" across the bay to historic Russell, which would take hrs to get to by road, then drive into the water again and cross to Opuia, getting out at the ramp next to the Opuia Marina, and roll down the road again to Pahia. Great fun!

The Dune Rider is another unique vehicle with a crazy look. The Cape Reinga tour is a long day (12 hrs) if you start out at Pahia. It can be shorter if you board at Keri Keri or towns more north along the route to the Cape. There are many tour buses that do this same tour, at the same times, except that Dune Rider makes some stops that the others don't including a dinner stop at a "local color" fish and chip shop in Mangonui that serves working-fisherman-size portions of fish and fries for a price the fisherman appreciate. This saves you the hassle of finding your dinner after the tour back in Pahia. Fun features: Cape Reinga light house, boogie boarding down giant sand dunes, driving on 90 mile beach at low tide, the Puketi Kauri forest, and Ancient Kauri Kingdom wood-craft/coffee shop, and more. A tour like this is the best way to visit the Northern most point of NZ and get fascinating facts without driver's fatigue.

Culture North - Waitangi

Ph: 09-402 5990

www.culturenorth.co.nz

Treaty of Waitangi – Sound & Light Show. We thought that this would be a reenactment of the Treaty which is the most controversial agreement ever made between the Maori tribes and the white settlers of New Zealand, and is still debated to this day. But this theatrical evening is a wonderful bit of storytelling where a Grandmother tells her grandson, Moko, the legends of their people, the story behind the Treaty, dancing and games of the Maori, and the challenges facing the Maori and their place in historic and modern NZ. Throughout the play are flash backs and points of view of the Maori and whites and it is filled with thoughtfulness, objectivity, and education and a beautiful blending of humor and seriousness. The author and leader of this troupe of mostly young volunteers from towns all around the area, is a modest gentleman, Kena Alexander who is "just a sheep farmer" whose passion to tell the story of the Maori situation in a non-extremist and entertaining way, has led him to create this seasonal theatrical performance which is now in its fourth year. He accompanies the bus that goes all around the Pahia area picking up the guests and prepares them for this interactive evening. Really well done.

Fullers – Bays of Islands Cruises & Tours – Pahia wharf

Ph: 09-402 7421

www.fboi.co.nz

Cruises: Cape Brett 'Hole in the Rock', The Cream Trip supercruise, Dolphin Adventures, Excitor Fast Boat. Tours: Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach, Keri Keri or Russell Mini Tours. Based at Pahia wharf. The Fuller name goes way back (1886) to the early days of the first farmers in the Bay of Islands area. Now they have a fleet of varied and modern boats and buses that do every kind of tour in the Bay of Islands and surrounding area. We went on the Super Cream Tour, thinking it was named that because it was the "crème de la crème" of their tours. Imagine our surprise when we found out that it is essentially the original route of the first Fuller's vessel that used to make the rounds visiting all the dairy farms on the islands and picking up the cream and delivering mail and supplies before there were roads. In fact, the now super sleek state-of-the-art catamaran, still delivers mail and supplies to the modern farmers still out on the isolated islands.

Capt. Geoff Bird was a floating encyclopedia of fascinating information about the natural, historic, and marine aspects of the Bay of Islands. He gave us a good preview of calm anchorages to come back and cruise with the sailboat. I thought he was a documentary commentator in his former life! When we saw his calm nerves of steel as he maneuvered into the jagged mouth of the Hole in the Rock off the end of Cape Brent and held it there steady enough for us to see the starfish on the rocks as 6-8 ft swells came sweeping through the Hole, we knew he was not just a handsome face with a golden voice! He took us right up to breaking waves at Black Rocks and other places that any sailboat person only wants to see from at least 2 miles off! Amazing...these New Zealanders are crazy daring!

Taiamai Tours - Pahia

Ph: 09-405 9990

www.taiamaitours.co.nz

Unique tour ... Here is another passionate advocate of the native peoples of the northern area of the North Island. Hone Mihaka is from a tribe called the Ngapuhi, and who according to legend, were already here when the first Maori arrived. He is creating a new tour/cultural experience that takes you to significant places from Pahia to Keri Keri. We were fortunate to get a preview of Hone's ideas, and to give input for development of the final product. In the Puketi Kauri forest that we had already visited with a guide telling us the naturalist and white settler history, we got an entirely different perspective, and were moved by the emotion with which Hone spoke about his father, as he showed us his father's face in the weapon that he had carved to tell his story. The trip took us up the river by steam boat, and to Keri Keri where we were taken back in history in a most surprising and interactive way. I won't spoil the surprise, go for yourself, and learn the legends.

Waiwera Thermal Resort & Spa - Waiwera

Ph: 09-427 8800

www.waiwera.co.nz

Holiday park, Resort hotel, Spa, Naturally heated pools, Whirling rides & waterslides. Waiwera is just outside of Owhera town, and is a family-oriented water activity park featuring a variety of different swimming and sitting pools of different temperatures. There is a large public pool, a water slide complex of about 5 different slides, an "adult" pool that was full of kids, and the hottest pool under a roof that was 40 degrees C. and a challenge even to the Japanese tourists. There is also a more exclusive Spa, and fitness center. Entrance to the public pools: \$20 NZ, \$8 (Seniors), \$50 (Family of 4)

Restaurants

'Darryl's' Dinner Cruise - Pahia

Ph: 09-402 8136

darrylsdinnercruises@xtra.co.nz

Dinner cruises departing from Pahia. A thoroughly enjoyable way to see Haru Haru falls (1 of only 2 horseshoe shaped falls in the world?!) by cruising up the Waitangi River, and to enjoy a delicious steak or fish BBQ, while meeting other interesting visitors to New Zealand. The funky and fun vessel, "Huckle Ferry" will be sharing the limelight with Darryl's new larger vessel which he just took commission of during our visit.

'Only Seafood' restaurant in Pahia

Ph: 09-402 7085

only.seafood@xtra.co.nz

We love seafood, and New Zealand has an abundance of it! Only Seafood's selections are almost all NZ products and are fresh and delicious. The presentation of dishes is colorful and tasteful in many senses of the word. Entrees are about \$15-\$17 average. We weren't disappointed by ordering one of the plates featuring a selection of goodies like green mussels, oysters, etc. The desserts listed on the blackboard were too tempting to pass up even after being stuffed with seafood!

Makana Confections – Keri Keri

Ph: 09-407 6800

www.makana.co.nz

"Boutique" Chocolate Factory in Kerikeri. YUM! This Confectionary is newly-come to the small town of Keri Keri, but has made a big hit already. The sparkling facility has it's chocolates displayed to reflect the works of art that they are. The chocolates are sold only out of this boutique and thru internet, and you can see these works of art being created by hand (and of course, have a little taste of selected samples!) We loved the Mocha-damias!!

Trip to explore the NORTH ISLAND SOUTH OF AUCKLAND

WAITOMO

Famous for the Glowworms which actually can be seen in caves everywhere in NZ and even in the forest at night, Waitomo is worth more than zooming in on a tour bus zooming through the Glowworm Cave and zooming away again. This area is very quiet in the low season, and the caves and forest walks are wonderful. Exploration can be quiet or adventurous, wet or dry. And DO NOT MISS Billy Black's Kiwi Culture Show!

Accommodations

Kiwi Paka YHA – Waitomo Caves

Ph: 07-878 3395

www.kiwipaka-yha.co.nz

Modern economy accommodation. This was the newest (<2 yrs) and most modern of the YHAs that we stayed at. It reflects a new trend in Backpacker-type accommodations. We stayed in one of the ensuite chalet units that are away from the main building. These units are less than 1 yr old and rival resort motel rooms. There was private porch, with glass door and large picture windows, a large room, and large bathroom that can be used by handicapped. These ran \$75 NZ as compared to the regular doubles w/ bathroom down the hall at \$56 NZ. The kitchen was sparkling and spacious, the dining area has a deck for al fresco and large windows to enjoy the sun. The reading room and internet terminal were very small though, and access intermittent. The reception is large, staff friendly, and there is an on-site Pizza restaurant/cafe which is very nice and has good pizzas. The YHA is about a 100yds up the hill from the Museum of Caves and a small grocery and ice cream store in the center of "town" (3-4 buildings) which is also the bus stop for Intercity and others.

Woodlyn Park

Ph: 070878 6666

www.woodlynpark.co.nz

see below

Activities

The Legendary Black Water Rafting Co.

Ph: 0800-228 464

www.blackwater rafting.co.nz

Caving adventures. We admit that even before we set foot in NZ, we wanted to experience this adventure! These folks were one of the very first to respond to our e-mail enquiries and were right there with prompt replies to every question with friendliness and enthusiasm. Like many adventure activities in NZ, they provide EVERYTHING! You show up in your swimsuit and bring a towel. They give you everything from booties, long johns, wetsuit, to crash helmet. They take care of everything from pick-up to the Hot Showers and toasted Bagels. We did one of several different experiences offered, "the Black Abyss". This is a non-stop fun adventure that is well choreographed to keep you interested and moving. The guides (ours was Fraser and another) give you brief easy training, make you feel safe, and keep you laughing. The half-day experience involves practicing abseiling (a kind of rappelling), then the real thing dropping 100ft into the cave, scrambling, zooming on a flying fox, bagels w/ coffee or tea, jumping into the frigid waters with your inner tube, then tubing down the river and back looking at the incredible display of glowworms, more scrambling, swimming, more hot drinks and chocolate, squeezing through tunnels, scaling small water falls on your way back to the surface, and the reward of hot showers and more food in their on-premises café. They have activities for every physical level and make it more fun than challenging. You'll have a blast!

Waitomo Adventures Ltd

Ph: 0800-924 866

www.waitomo.co.nz

Caving adventures With the LBWR Co., these two are the longest running cave adventure companies in Waitomo. Each company has it's own cave systems and choices of adventure level, so there is no competition since you experience different locations. After the wet adventure and a 100ft abseil, we wanted to try the 400ft, drop in day light to the Lost World Cave, and the half-day dry caving experience. It was low season, and we were surprised that they ran the trip for only us 2. James was our personal guide, a mild mannered, totally competent young man who instilled confidence in us just by his calm way and quiet attention to our safety. Our 6am departure was rewarded with an early morning panorama of the Waitomo area on our way to the cave. The abseil was amazingly effortless without any strain on my arthritic hands. The descent is so easy to control that even with my uneasiness at great heights, I felt only exhilaration and fascination to see the floor of the canyon and the sheer-sided deep crevices around us. Looking up from the bottom was more dizzying than the inverse! The Lost World Cave was quite different from Black Abyss. There was lots of light from the outside entrance giving an ethereal "cathedral" quality to the cave. We climbed out straight up a 100ft ladder in the dark of the cave. Stopping half way and looking around was thrilling. At the exit is another Kodak Moment as you ascend into the glowing daylight filtering through the trees through a rock archway. Another innovative Kiwi idea is sending the memory chip with the photos taken during the trip back to the office by carrier pigeon so

that the photos will be posted for viewing the moment you arrive back at the reception center!

Waitomo Glow Worm Caves

Ph: 0800-456 922

www.waitomocaves.co.nz

Glowworm Cave tour. This is the classic tour that made Waitomo famous. Bus loads of tourists visit the caves as they are guided thru with well-rehearsed Maori guides. The cave is tiled and paved and hand railed to handle the heavy traffic thru the dry cave and it's huge caverns at the 15m underground level. At the end, you descend to 40+ meters below the surface to the underground river to float silently, viewing the glowworms which look like constellations of stars.

Waitomo Museum of Caves

Ph: 07-878 7640

www.waitomo-museum.co.nz

Excellent cave interpretation center. This is an excellent place to start your exploration of Waitomo Caves, as it gives you insight into the area and how it was formed, the geology, and the flora and fauna of the caves. The story of the glowworm life cycle is fascinating. The curator, Kevan, was instrumental in developing the trails through the Ruakuri area.

Woodlyn Park

Ph: 070878 6666

www.woodlynpark.co.nz

Billy Black's Kiwi Culture Show, Drive yourself Jetboats and Unique Motel Accommodation in Waitomo Caves. There aren't just caves and glowworms in Waitomo. Billy Black's is one of the most fun and clever shows that we saw in New Zealand. This one-man show is entertaining, educational, historical and hysterical! Billy, who looks like Robin Williams in Kiwi clothing, keeps alive Kiwi heritage, and gives a good look at Kiwi ingenuity and humor, and way of life from past to present. His menagerie of animals are a delight. He involves his audience and keeps 'em laughing! The U-drive Jetboat was a real blast, as it's the only place you can drive these skittish beasts yourself. It's easy to learn, and work your way up to the timed laps to race against the clock. I beat Luc's time by a hair's breath! The rail car and WWII plane accommodations are clean and modern and a fun way for a family to stay "some where different".

ROTORUA

The famous geo-thermal activity area in New Zealand. This place has not only the natural thermal parks and thermal spas, but lots of Maori culture, white settler history, rafting, fishing, farm shows, gondola, and new millennium amusement “rides” that are 3-dimensional exhilarating experiences.

Tourism Rotorua

Ph: 07-349 2641

www.rotoruaNZ.com

Any help organizing a visit to Rotorua. New Zealand has tourism honed to a fine art, and Rotorua is the finest artist of the bunch. They are located in the heart of Rotorua in the new modern building which also houses the Intercity Bus Station, and is a pick-up point for all the shuttle buses to the major attractions. You can soak your tired feet in the Thermal Foot Pool outside as you wait for your bus or shuttle.

Accommodations

Hot Rock Backpackers

Ph: 07-347-9469

www.acb.co.nz/hotrock

Budget accommodation in Rotorua. One of the best known Backpackers in Rotorua, this facility features it's own thermal pools, and plenty of hot water in the showers! Most rooms have ensuite and balcony. We had a family unit w/ two bedrooms and a kitchenette with mini-fridge and full stove, overlooking Ruirau Thermal Park, and farthest away from the on-site Lava Bar which has plenty of fun for those who wish. Hot Rocks is a regular pick-up point for all major activities, and bookings can be done here.

Planet Nomad B/packers

Ph: 07-346 2831

www.planetnomad.co.nz

Backpacker accommodation in central Rotorua. Right next to the Intercity Bus station/ tourist info center, this backpackers is centrally located. Though smaller, and less glitzy than the Hot Rocks, it still has plenty of very clean and new toilets and showers and it's location and it's bank of internet terminals make it a popular accommodation.

Activities / Attractions

Hell's Gate Thermal Park and Spa

Ph: 07-345 3151

www.hellsgate.co.nz

Mud volcano & geothermal park and Spa & Wellness Center, in Rotorua.

This thermal area is more compact and more active than Wai-O-Tapu, and has different features. Again, a rainy day, but we were provided with umbrellas, and we were still able to enjoy the area, because features are closer. Our favorite was the forested hot water waterfall. We had wished we were of the tribe that could shower and bathe in the curative waters. The Spa and Mud bath/Sulfur pools are accessed through the reception building and should be booked ahead. The mud baths were not thick mud as I imagined but were SS bathtubs of sulfur water with a thin layer of mud from the thermal park in the bottom. After a recommended time, in the private warm bath we took a COLD shower and then rushed to the warm public sulfur pool to relax and tingle for as long as we wanted next to the tea and refreshment room. Towels, robe, hair dryer, and regular showers provided. You may also book a therapeutic massage. Café on premises. Call for shuttle service info, as this is also out of town past the airport, heading northeast toward Lake Rotoiti.

Off Road NZ

Ph: 07-332 5748

www.offroadnz.co.nz

Drive yourself to the max! Sprint Car Racing, 4WD Bush Safari, Monster 4x4 Thrill Ride & Claybird Shooting, Archery & Golf Hole-in-1. All these activities in one location! The facility is some ways out of town, but the free Agrodome shuttle also provides service to here and Skyline Skyride in the morning and the afternoon. We had a very friendly welcome, and all the staff were enthusiastic and fun. Caleb, our guide, for 3 events had a wide boyish grin with just a touch of wickedness as he drove us over the 4x4 Maxi challenge course or briefed us for the impossibly high "luge" slide on the drive-yourself Bush Safari course. The race car sprint course was a kick, and I beat Luc's 10 lap time by a hair's breath! (even with my spin-out off the track!).

Polynesian Spa

Ph: 07-348 1328

www.polynesianspa.co.nz

Hot mineral bathing & Spa therapies. If you want to be spoiled and pampered in a luxuriant setting right in the city limits of Rotorua, this is the place to go. It has family public pools, private hot pool nooks, or our favorite, the Lake Spa Retreat featuring 4 rock-lined free-form pools of controlled temperatures blended into the lake-side setting to give a relaxed escape into a soothing natural ambiance. The retreat area, with its up-scale feel and amenities is amazingly affordable. It also offers unique Spa massages and therapies. Polynesian Spa is open early morning to late evening. NOT to be missed.

River Rats

Ph: 0800-333 900

www.riverrats.co.nz

White-water Rafting Adventures. River Rats offer several different rivers and grades to cater to any skill level. We went on the 3hr Kaituna Gorge trip. Our guides, Paula and Nev picked us up at Hot Rocks Backpackers, and even tho there were only the 2 of us signed up, did not cancel and were as up-beat and fun as though we were a big group. After a 20-25 min drive to RR Base, we were provided ALL gear, we brought only swimsuit and towel. Another 5 min drive and we were at the launch site. Got an explanation and simulation of commands. The 45 min on the river literally rushed by through a beautiful steep-sided fern forested canyon over about 12 rapids from grade 2 all the way up to two grade 5s. At the ruins of an old power station, we pulled into an eddy for the thorough briefing on our first grade 5, a series of 2 drops in rapid succession. I always felt the utmost confidence in our guides. The ultimate, is the 7m waterfall! We flipped the raft, but our instructions were so good, I just followed the rules and popped up in the air pocket and waited for them to flip the raft back over. The best part was looking at the photos afterwards! The incredible high speed shots of the pro-photographers were amazing. If I had seen the waterfall from the bottom side, I never would have believed that we could have done it! Or that it was us in the actual action photos! A great experience! I was worried about my arthritis, but the adrenalin must have lubricated all my joints, I felt great for days!

Rotorua 5 Star Attractions

Ph: 0800-557 827

www.rotorua5starattractions.co.nz

5 star pass. 5 of Rotorua's most popular attractions for one price that gives you 10% off the entry price. NZ Arts and Crafts Institute, Polynesian Spa, Agrodome, Skyline Gondola, and Paradise Valley Springs Wildlife Park.

Rotorua Agrodome

Ph: 0800-339 400

www.agrodome.co.nz

Live Sheep Show. The Kiwis have innovatively made farming (actually ranching) a tourist attraction. The famous Agrodome Farm Show is an entertaining learning experience with an awful lot of showmanship and great Kiwi dry humor. Here, the Farmers are the Hams, not the pigs! Never knew that there were so many kinds of sheep for so many purposes. The dogs really stole the show with their intelligence and training.

NZ Farm Tour

Ph: 07-348 8683

www.nzfarmshow.co.nz

Award-winning premier farming experience, located in Agrodome – Rotorua. A tour of the actual working ranch/farm/orchard on the Agrodome grounds. Our guide Ken and his adorable little dog, Ben were our gracious hosts.

Rotorua Agrojet

Ph: 07-357 2929

agrojet@xtra.co.nz

NZ's fastest Jet-boating experience, located at Agrodome. The expert drives you around a heart-wrenching track and shows you the meaning of centrifugal force!

Rotorua Swoop & Bungy

Ph: 07-357 47 47

www.rotorua Bungy.co.nz

Amazing adrenalin buzz activities, located at the Agrodome complex. New Zealanders have the most imaginative, crazy, and scary activities found anywhere in the world! Here you can scare yourself silly by either bungy jumping or the more gentle but still hair-raising Swoop which starts as an incredible plummeting 40 meter fall that swoops into a giant pendulum swing at the end. This 50 year old coward Swooped and whooped!

Freefall Xtreme

Ph: 07-357 5856

www.freefallxtreme.com

Southern Hemisphere Only Freefall Skydive Simulator. A giant wind machine that has you defying gravity as you fly UP instead of falling down! My idea of anti-skydiving! This is the most challenging of all activities because you control how well you do by your body positioning. Crazy fun as you try to fly without getting flipped out by the blower or zoomed up against the top net.

Zorb Rotorua

Ph: 0800-227 474

www.zorb.com

Dry-harnessed and hydro zorb. What the xxx is a Zorb?? It's a giant translucent vinyl ball suspended within another more gigantic ball that rolls down the hill with you inside, either suspended inside with a harness or sloshing around in soapy slippery water. The "wet" ride for 2 people was the most hilarious and fun amusement ride I have ever done in my life. I was hysterically laughing the whole time and couldn't stop laughing for 10 minutes afterwards! There is no jolting or jarring unless you do the zigzag course. DO IT!

Rotorua Duck

Ph: 07-345 6522

www.rotorua ducktours.co.nz

Amphibious tours. This is the Rotorua version of the Pahia Duck (see Pahia section). The 90 min tour leaves from the tourist info center, and tours you on the roads and in 3 lakes, Rotorua, Blue, and a third, where you can see Mt Tarawera and learn about the devastating explosion of 1886. Everyone gets a duck-beak whistle souvenir and quacks at the tourists and motorists on the route! All Kiwi activities have a laugh and a bit of fun in them!

Rotorua Museum

Ph: 07-349 4350

www.rotoruamuseum.co.nz

Museum of Art & History. This is a very nicely done museum, which is set on the historic grounds of the Government Gardens and looks like a Bavarian great lodge, which can be seen for miles around. There are the classic static displays, but there is also new technology in the “sense-o-round” theatre presentation of the Mt Tarawera eruption, and computer generated holographic narration in the basement of the Bath House where their display, titled “Taking the Cure” brings to life the early days of Spa therapy in the curative thermal waters. There are also well-done displays of Maori culture from prehistoric to the Maori battalion that so impressed the Europeans in WWII.

Skyline Rotorua

Ph: 07-347-0027

www.skyline.co.nz

This Gondola Ride company is associated with the Gondola in Queenstown, having the same formula featuring the Luge ride, on concrete tracks. Some people we talked to said this luge was more fun than Q-town's (we got rained out on that one). It was a lot of fun and can be as hair-raising as you want to make it, as they have tracks with 3 levels of difficulty, and you control the braking (or “breaking”!) The Gondola Ride itself is not as vertical and vertigo-inducing as the Queenstown gondola, but the views of the Lake Rotorua and the surrounds is supremely picturesque, especially in the late afternoon. Up top, they have other activities as well: Sky Swing, a Shooting gallery, a simulator ride, and scenic walking trails. There is a Gift Shop, and Café with terrace to see the view or watch the Luge loonies. One of the greatest features is the evening Buffet. A Super Thumbs-up, AAA Winner! See below in the Restaurant category.

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland

Ph: 07-366 6333

www.geyserland.co.nz

Walks thru geothermal activity, in Rotorua . A mini-version of Yellowstone US National Park. Their “Old Faithful” geyser, called Lady Knox Geyser, is induced to blow each morning at 10:15AM, since naturally, it isn't so faithful and one can never know when it will blow. We unfortunately had a rainy cool day which had a lot of fog caused by the heat of the thermal activity, so viewing was quite limited, and the colors of the mineral muds were not vibrant. If you've seen Yellowstone, you may not be impressed, but any one who has not seen geothermal areas, would enjoy this. A shuttle service or rental car is necessary to see this area which is 27km south of Rotorua and 53km northeast of Taupo.

Cultural experiences

Mitai

Ph: 07-343 9132

www.mitai.co.nz

Up close & personal Maori Cultural Experience. This was the smallest and one of the newest of the many Maori Dinner/Performance nights offered in the area, but we thought it was perhaps the most authentic and educational of all the performances we saw and we hope that it becomes a success while keeping it's goals of teaching the public about Maori culture. The performance was done at a small open-air "village" site with the audience under a covered area. I thought it was the best performance because it conveys most strongly the deep feeling that the Mitai family have for their native heritage. The Chief/Narrator was the perfect combination between serious and humorous. Warriors were clad only in fiber loincloths w/ G-strings, faces fully painted in tattoo patterns unique to each one, women with the "owl" tattoo painted on the chin. Weapon demonstrations were actual martial art matches, not choreographed, and you sense the seriousness of the training. Musical instruments were traditional drums, flutes, noise makers. Only once did they play the guitar only to say that it helped to bring young people's interest back to the language and stories of the Maoris. The "hangi" meal was actually cooked in an "umu" with good smoked flavor. Again, they stuck more closely to traditional fare, and plenty of it. After the dinner, we were treated to a night bush walk among glow worms, culminating at their natural artesian spring where the huge fresh water eels and trout seemed to be suspended in the air, so pure was the water. At all times the Mitai family were attentive to our comfort providing, heat, blankets, umbrellas, and lights when needed. Free Shuttle. A great evening...if you do only one Maori night, and you want more tradition, do Mitai.

Tamaki Maori Village

Ph: 07-346 2823

www.maoriculture.co.nz

Maori Village Experience and traditional meal. This evening performance at the Tamaki Village, about 20 minutes drive out of town on complimentary buses, seemed to be the most popular and highly attended of all the Maori Dinner/Performance shows in the area. Everyone, from the bus drivers to the restaurant staff were part of the entertainment, which begins as soon as you step in the bus. The only negative was that the ticketing is done at the in-town site, and you must wait until everyone is ticketed and assigned to buses, wasting almost an hour. But the bar and boutique is open to pass time. At the village site, you witness the traditional Challenge/Greeting, wander thru a firelit simulated village with traditional activities going on, then see the performance in the Fare Nui of games, weapons, songs, instruments, and dance. The meal is served in a huge dining area, with efficient and bustling staff making sure everyone gets served quickly. The meal was 90% hot Hangi dishes from the earth oven. A few salads were served and veggie meals were available. The desserts were more traditional, steam pudding cake, and custard sauce. The bus drivers did a Hakka dance complete with bulging eyes and protruding tongues as a finale. Very funny.

Tamaki – Realm of Tane

Ph: 07-346 2823

www.experience.maori.nz

Dramatic blend of guided tour, character theatre & story telling in a meeting house & beautiful native garden, in Rotorua. This day time performance takes place several times a day at the Tamaki Visitor Center at 1220 Hinemaru St. This is a very different contemporary kind of performance mixing theatre, audio-visual, hot house garden walk, and food tasting. Well blended, it keeps moving. The native bush teas and relishes were a unique tasting experience. There is a second garden you must do before or after, called the Sacred Garden. The orchids and tropical exotics are breathtaking, and the ambiance calming and artful. The gift shop offers the bush relishes that were tasted.

The New Zealand Maori Arts & Crafts Institute

Ph: 07-348 9047

www.nzmaori.co.nz

Walk around the thermal reserve and experience Maori culture in Rotorua. Located on the grounds of a thermal park in the Wakawerawera area, this facility has two beautiful geysers, and an extensive boutique of Maori arts and crafts. We went to the evening *Mai Ora* experience, in which you visit the *Fare nui*, meeting house and participate in the Maori Challenge/Greeting and see a performance demonstrating Maori culture. Afterwards, you enjoy the plentiful dinner buffet featuring several dishes cooked in the thermal pit with natural steam, not fire. The ambiance of the restaurant was lacking in Maori décor, but the array of food, from cold oysters, prawns, mussels and smoked fish, to venison stew, leg of lamb, and the thermally cooked pork and chicken and marvelous desserts, made that unimportant. Complimentary shuttle bus included.

Whakarewarewa

Ph: 0800-924 426

www.whakarewarewa.com

Visit the living thermal village, off Rotorua. This is a real village where present day Maoris actually live in contemporary homes, but still use the hot bubbling springs and steam vents in everyday cooking, bathing, and health treatments. You can feel the heat beneath your feet as you walk. You can take a guided walk which is very informative and greatly enhances your visit, or you can just visit the small town and wander the streets and pools on your own. There's a beautiful view of the Pohutu and Prince of Wales Feathers' geysers from a distance. You must order a naturally steam-cooked meal at the café, or at least try the geothermally boiled corn on the cob... delicious! Again, this is a more discreet thermal area than the rest, but interesting because it's different. Inexpensive shuttle from tourist bureau.

Restaurants

Mitai

Ph: 07-343 9132

www.mitai.co.nz

see above

Pigs & Whistle

Haupapa St, around the corner from tourism office. This eatery is known for its copious dishes for a reasonable price. We went in just for a brew, but when Luc saw the huge plate of curlie-cue French fries, and I saw the platter of BBQ ribs, our dinner restaurant selection was made!

Skyline Rotorua

Ph: 07-347-0027

www.skyline.co.nz

We are gourmand Buffet Buffs and try them all if we can. We enjoyed the Queenstown Skyline Buffet, but the Rotorua Skyline has them beat hands down! This buffet had the most exotic choices of all the different ones that we went to: Giant crab legs, Slipper lobsters, clams, mussels, prawns, Salmon (raw and smoked), octopus, and a freshly steamed mussel bowl brought to your table on request! Exotic hot foods, for example: rabbit, venison, rack of lamb, and specials cooked to order before you such as whitebait fritters, a very rare and special treat to New Zealanders. They had different luscious desserts, unseen at other buffets, even Christchurch Casino. And the coffee sweets and cheese board.....WOW!

Tamaki Maori Village

Ph: 07-346 2823

www.maoriculture.co.nz

see above

The New Zealand Maori Arts & Crafts Institute

Ph: 07-348 9047

www.nzmaori.co.nz

see above

Whakarewarewa

Ph: 0800-924 426

www.whakarewarewa.com

see above

NAPIER

On the E. coast of central North Island. This area is known for its wineries, the 1931 earthquake that leveled the area and caused it to be rebuilt in the Art Deco Style of the era, and the only Marine Land in New Zealand.

Accommodations

Napier YHA

Ph: 06-835 7039

www.stayya.com

Budget accommodation. Situated literally, right across the street from Marine Land, this YHA, though smaller than some, was very pleasant, light and airy, with very clean kitchen and bathrooms. Our double room had big picture windows overlooking the seaside across the street. There is a very nice patio in back. While not in the center of town, the walks are not far to good eating places, shopping, groceries & major activities.

Activities / Attractions

Hawke's Bay Museum

Ph: 06-835 7781

www.hawkesbaymuseum.co.nz

Art – Culture – Heritage, in Napier. Another very fine museum with an emphasis on the Art Deco Era of Napier and surrounds, the devastating 1931 earthquake with fascinating voice accounts of survivors, discovery of dinosaur and extinct moa bird remains in the area by local New Zealanders, and changing exhibits.

Marineland of New Zealand

Ph: 06-834 4027

www.marineland.co.nz

NZ's only marine zoo, swim with the dolphins, marine animal encounter. In Napier. The nothing like the grand scale of Sea World in San Diego, it's NZ's only such Marine Park. The facility is going on 40 yrs old, but is well maintained and continually up-graded. The people there really believe in what they do, and animals and people alike are one great big family with all the joys and worries that go with it. We discovered this as Amanda, a long time employee, took us on the Behind the Scenes tour. Most of the animals, such as penguins, birds and seals, are survivors of injuries and unable to return to the wild. The most popular activity besides the daily Show, is the Swim with the Dolphins. The 2 stars of Marineland are the 2 female Common Dolphins, which are now 36-34 yrs old, more than twice the life expectancy of these animals in the wild, and are as lively and mischievous as youngsters. Common Dolphins are much more sleek and beautiful than the Atlantic Bottlenose of most Marine Lands. They got very excited and playful when we dived and swam like them. They come very close, but do not let you touch them. The sessions, 35-40 min, are very popular and during the high season, must be booked months ahead. In early May, there was no waiting.

TAUPO

In the Central North Island interior on the banks of Lake Taupo. You can make this a stop if you travel from Napier to Waitomo, or from Tauranga, Rotorua, south towards Wellington or vice versa.

Activities

Huka Jet

Ph: 0800-485 2538

www.hukajet.com

Jetboat ride from the Wairekei Tourist Park, 5-10 min drive north of Taupo. Jet boating is a high speed thrill, and the drivers like to add a sense of “danger” as they pass within inches of trees, posts, obstacles, and spin 360s on the way up to Huka Falls, the spectacular high volume waterfalls, where you get up close and personal with the thundering foaming cataract. The Prawn Farm is located right next door in this isolated geothermal area.

Taupo Tandem Skydiving New Zealand

Ph: 0800-275 934

www.tts.net.nz

Tandem skydiving. We only spent an afternoon in Taupo area, but Luc absolutely HAD to try this. There are several places to hurl yourself out of a plane attached to a Jumpmaster, but these folks do more jumps than all the others and offer heights of 9000', 12000' (\$199) and 15000' (\$299), giving you a chance for long, long freefalls. Everything was efficiently and effectively done with emphasis on fun and excitement. They make it seem as easy as falling off a log! About 15 min of instruction is all you need, the Jumpmaster does the rest. Luc's Austrian Jumpmaster, Freddie, has 25 yrs as instructor and was enthusiastic, fun, and attentive to the anxiety level of his jumpers. You can have a personalized video or photos of your experience. Luc was so exhilarated and jazzed that he wanted to go again! Almost every one we talked to said the same. The staff was very helpful to me to tell me when and where to position myself to video from the ground.

HAMILTON

South of Auckland on the main highway, Hamilton is not really a tourist city, but more a center of commerce. It could be a good stop-over to or from Auckland and the other tourist regions of the North Island.

Accommodations

Helen Heywood YHA – Hamilton

Ph: 07-838 0009

www.stayya.com

Budget accommodation. We zoomed in late and left early, so did not get a good chance to know the facility, but our Host was very helpful in accommodating our tight schedule by streamlining the check-in and out procedures. The double was roomy, though the rest of the facilities were some what cramped down the long narrow building.

Activities/Restaurant

Waipa Delta Cruises

Ph: 0800-472 335

www.waipadelta.co.nz

Paddle Boat cruises : lunchtime, afternoon tea & evening/dinner cruises out of Hamilton.

This was a very nicely done little dinner cruise on the Waikato River. The replica Riverboat has indoor and open-air decks, so can accommodate any weather. The rainy evening we had was no hindrance as we felt cozy and comfortable, and in between sprinkles, we could go out doors and view the villas and wooded banks and the 3 magnificently lighted bridges that cross the river, each a different color and design. Though we were a small number of people that night, the buffet was still beautifully presented, copious and delicious, and the carvery board not lacking. Keith, our entertainer and crew, had a very nice voice and just the right kind of music for a dinner cruise, not too sappy, not too loud or harsh. Hamilton is a cross roads if you're traveling to/from Rotorua/Taupo/Napier or Wellington, and this could make a nice stop-over activity.

WELLINGTON

The actual Capitol of New Zealand. This windy city was quite calm and balmy the 2 times we went thru in April and in May. It's more low key than Auckland, but there are pockets of color like the Cuba St. district for restaurants, and the biggest treasure for me was the ultra-modern Te Papa Museum. We spent hours there.

Accommodations

Downtown Backpackers

Ph: 04-473 8482

www.downtownbackpackers.co.nz

Hostel in historic Art Deco Hotel Waterloo. This is a well-known Backpackers. It is located very close to the train station, and Lynx ferry terminal, with shuttles to the Interislander Ferry. Our ensuite double had tub/shower, couch, big vanity w/ mirror, and coffee in the room! Temperature control was perfect. There is even a café right in the dining area, next to the self-serve kitchen. Unfortunately, the building and furnishings are getting a little thread-bare and the staff and ambiance were more cool and sterile compared to others. The kitchen had the barest essentials and from the signs posted everywhere, seems like there are often guests that like to help themselves to things permanently. Welcome to the big city.

Rowena's Lodge Backpackers

Ph: 0800-801 414

www.wellingtonbackpackers.co.nz

Backpacker accommodation. This backpackers has seen better days. It's true that they offer a free shuttle from the ferry terminal, but we had to ask every other shuttle where was the Rowena shuttle before we were directed to a sloppy looking fellow who had his sign reversed so it couldn't be read, and he brusquely directed us to a rickety van. This was the only accommodation that wasn't spotless.

Activities

Karori Wildlife Sanctuary

Ph: 04-920 9200

www.sanctuary.org.nz

Rare endemic birds sanctuary in Wellington suburbs. A short public bus trip from the center of Wellington, this is a nature Sanctuary in the middle of the suburbs. Situated around two old reservoirs that in earlier days supplied Wellington's rapidly growing city with water, it has now been preserved to provide habitat to many of the unique endemic song birds of New Zealand. The deep valley, formed by the Wellington Fault, was also the scene of an unfruitful gold rush in 1869. One of the claim tunnels, the Morning Star, has been restored for visitors to explore. This non-profit organization survives only on

entry fees and donations or membership dues. There are kilometers of walking trails, historical sites, interpretive displays, and beautiful views of the valley and lakes.

Museum of Wellington City & Sea

Ph: 04-472 8904

www.museumofwellington.co.nz

Museum about Wellington history, maritime past, early Maori & European settlement. While not nearly as extensive and glitzy as Te Papa, this maritime museum is of interest to us hardy seafaring folk, and since it is nearly next door to Te Papa and is also Free Admission, is worth a visit. It inspires, as well as awes us as the exhibits show us the triumphs and tragedies of the maritime experiences around this island nation.

Te Papa Museum

Ph: 04-381 7000

www.tepapa.govt.nz

Modern museum with fun interactive learning & entertainment. This is the most state-of-the-art, exciting, interactive museum that we visited. Admission is FREE to the museum proper. They have a myriad of things to see and do. The Time Warp is their version of Disney's Epcot Center, in which they have "rides" for which you buy tickets and experience the "future", the past, or virtual bungee jumping or other Kiwi adventure activities. There's also a fun cinema taking you back through the immigrant experiences of New Zealand. There are plenty of restaurants, cafes, or picnic areas so you can stay all day. You certainly will want to, with 3 stories of exhibits to visit, as well as the native Bush Garden. You can also book guided tours or purchase self-guiding materials. This is a top award winning Museum, and deservedly so. Located on the water front of central Wellington.

Restaurants

R&S Satay Noodle House

Ph: 04-385 1496

148, Cuba Street, Wellington

Excellent & inexpensive Malaysian restaurant. There are many noodle houses like this all over the big cities of New Zealand, but the owners of the R&S are so welcoming and enthusiastic, that you may go back again to try another round of selections from their extensive menu and blackboard specials. We had Nasi Tomato, fried chicken wings, and a noodle dish, Hokkien Char, chosen for us by Rose, the « R » in R&S. You can choose the degree of spiciness! WOW! At \$4-\$8 NZ price range for dishes, you can order many dishes and have left-overs to take back to your Backpackers!

NORTH ISLAND – THE COROMANDEL

The Coromandel is one of the most scenic natural areas in the North Island. The bush forests are strange and primitive, the coastline has dramatic views, and beaches, including a Hot Water beach south of Whitianga.

Accommodations

Aotearoa Lodge, Tours & Adventures - Whitianga

Ph: 07-866 2807

www.tournz.co.nz

Whitianga accommodation and 2/3 days Coromandel tours. If you have your own transportation, or book a tour with them, you'll find Aotearoa Lodge is an isolated and peaceful place about 3km north of Whitianga. The Lodge is like a cross between a motor lodge and B&B. There are studio rooms and family suites housed within the main building, or self-contained units that can communicate for families, or be separated. There's a breakfast area, (included), 2 lounges, Laundry and internet hook-up possibility. Rennie is your hostess, and can provide a tour or suggest places to see. The citrus orchard on the premises ensures you fresh orange juice at breakfast.

The Estuary – Whangamata

Ph: 07-865 8841

www.the-estuary.co.nz

Luxurious accommodation Home-stay B&B in Whangamata, a small town that is a summer retreat area for many NZ-landers. There is peaceful seaside scenery and beautiful villas. One of the most gracious and genuine welcomes we got was here at the beautiful home of Don and Robin Tate who offer a delightful bed and breakfast experience with calming pastoral views of the estuary in a park-like setting. There will be no crowds to contend with as there are only 2 luxuriously spacious units with private terraces set to one side of the house so you can come and go as you please.

Activities

Kiwi Dundee Adventures

Ph: 07-865 8809

www.kiwidundee.co.nz

World famous nature walks & eco-tours. Whangamata and the Coromandel Peninsula. Doug Johansen has been fighting for the preservation of the wilderness of this area, as he has a family history here and has explored extensively since childhood. He won a NZ competition to find an equivalent to Crocodile Dundee, thus the name of his company. With his wife Jan, he organizes personalized tours of any duration, from a couple hours (which unfortunately was all we had) to New Zealand-wide multi-day expeditions. They can even arrange to pick-up a group of people from any marina from Auckland to Tauranga for the longer tours. Doug and Jan's extensive knowledge of historical and natural NZ, plus Doug's sense of fun and surprise would make any tour rewarding.

SOUTH ISLAND

PICTON

The gateway town to the South Island at the head of Queen Charlotte's Sound.

Activities / Attractions

Edwin Fox Society

Ph: 03-573 6868

http://members.xoom.co/edwin_fox/

Preservation effort to save the Edwin Fox vessel next to ferry terminal in Picton. Located right next to the Seahorse Aquarium. New Zealanders are restoration buffs, and the Edwin Fox Society has rallied around this teak wooden vessel launched in 1853, which since has had a very colorful history, and unfortunate old age. As yachtsmen, we can see an insurmountable task ahead, but admire their gumption, and were impressed with the museum, and their research into this and other ships of her time.

Seahorse World

Ph : 0800-800 081

www.seahorseworld.co.nz

Aquarium close to ferry terminal and the train station in Picton. If you've got some time in Picton before or after your ferry crossing, this is a nice little aquarium to visit to see seahorses and learn about their plight, also to see some local species of Marlborough Sounds, including their version of the Flying Gurnard.

KAIKOURA

This was once a sleepy little fishing town, but has now become a booming tourist spot and a much desired spot for the new homes of foreigners moving to NZ. The marine life is unique and prolific as a deep water trench lies just off shore. Whales stay here year-round, lobster fishing is re-known, many types of albatross normally far out in the ocean come here, and pods of dolphin in the “wild” cavort freely with boat loads of snorkelers.

Accommodations

Maui YHA - Kaikoura

Ph: 03-319 5931

www.stayyha.com

Budget Accommodation. Again, a different look from the other YHA's, the Maui YHA, as it is called, has an open airy, coastal motor-lodge look. There are lots of picture windows looking out to the sea. The place is bright and cheerful with pastel wallpapering. The kitchen/dining/internet area has great views of the coast, and towering mountains behind. The lodge is small with only 10 units, but our double was large compared to many YHA's, newly papered and carpeted. This facility is located on the E. end of town, about 2 km from the town “center” out towards the wharf and the peninsula.

Activities / Attractions

Ocean Wings

Ph: 0800-733 365

www.oceanwings.co.nz

Albatross Encounters & Dolphins boat tours off Kaikoura. The Ocean Wings folks have been in business for many years, and they contribute moneys from souvenir sales to bird and marine wildlife conservation/preservation and research funds. Last year, they donated \$3000 to help long line fishing boats equip to avoid catching albatross. We went on the Albatross Encounter, and the guides were very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the different Albatross species and the myriad other marine birds. We saw 5-6 types including 2 rarely seen Yellow-nosed, normally found in the Indian Ocean. As an additional treat, the dusky dolphins came around and did high jumps and splashes amongst the birds as if to try to out shine the major attraction! The boat also took us to see fur seals, and we got to see a sea lion “playing” with an octopus that he had caught, and rare Hector Dolphins, the smallest species. Great day out, and great photo and video opportunities! Unlike in larger metropolitan areas, this tourist activity did not do pick-ups at accommodations. It is located in the “center” of the small town that runs lengthwise along the coast.

Wings over Whales Limited

Ph: 0800-226 629

www.whales.co.nz

Whale watching flights, Kaikoura Airstrip. One of the best ways to quickly get to and see the resident whales is by air. It is somewhat more costly than boat trips, but there is something special about flying, and you get the added bonus of viewing the Kaikoura coast as well. Only about 10 percent of the time do they not see Whales because they know whale behavior, and the boats inform them if they spot some. We were in the unfortunate percentage because there were a lot of low clouds and fog. The company does not guarantee sightings, as these are wild creatures, but they can, at their discretion try to give you more flight time, or get you on another space-available flight.

Restaurants

The Craypot

Ph: 03-319 6027

www.craypot.co.nz

Seafood Café & Bar in Kaikoura center. Kaikoura is renown in NZ for it's seafood, especially the spiny lobsters that they call "crayfish". This establishment has been around for 40 years. I'm sure the "look" has evolved over those years from a salty local's chowder house to the sophisticated warm décor that it has now. The chowder is still hardy and thick with mussels and scallops and is one of the favorite menu items. Of course, the main attraction is the crayfish. Luc had the half Kaikoura crayfish served thermidor style. Quite yummy!

CHRISTCHURCH

This is the largest city in the South Island, and we used it as a base to make a couple different excursions. We rented a car to do a tour to Geraldine for white water rafting, and then on to Mt. Cook, before both these activities shut down in May for the season. Later we took trains and buses on a circuit from Christchurch to Greymouth and down the west coast, over to Queenstown, a side-trip to Milford Sound, back to the east coast to Dunedin, a side trip to Invercargill and the Catlin Coast, and back to Christchurch. We enjoyed this city and its many activities around the area, and its many varied choices of eating places.

Accommodations

Abel Tasman Motor Lodge

Ph: 0508-669 669

www.abeltasmanchch.co.nz

Affordable accommodation and car rentals close to the center of Christchurch. To us, a more economical way to travel NZ than by camper van is to go by car and stay at B&B's or motel facilities like this one that offers kitchenette, and multiple sleeping rooms. It's fairly close to town center and they have their own car rental agency.

Christchurch City Central YHA

Ph: 03-379 9535

www.stayya.com

Budget accommodation. This YHA is within a 10 min walk to the Cathedral, and central CC. The staff was friendly and helpful. There was a very large clean kitchen, a good number of showers and toilets, and a nice laundry facility. Close to restaurants and walkable to the CC Casino.

Activities

Balloon Adventures, Up Up and Away Ltd.

Ph: 03- 381 4600

www.ballooning.co.nz

Hot Air Ballooning over Christchurch plains. ANZAC Day is New Zealand's Memorial Day, which they take seriously, as just about everyone gets up at dawn for the memorial services. We too arose at dawn, but to celebrate the dawning of another beautiful day by soaring over the Canterbury countryside, witnessing the people gathering, the fall colors as we just cleared the tree tops thru the lifting fog, the mosaic of patterns of the fields and ranches, and the terrified herds as we landed in whichever field was at the end of our drift with the morning breezes. Our pilot, Chris Johnson, displayed the dry, crisp, Kiwi wit we found so prevalent throughout NZ. In a fun way, he put us through our paces in setting up the balloon and practicing landing procedures, and at the end blessed us with a champagne toast that is the balloonist's prayer. This company flies more balloonists than all the others and has a branch company in the Black Forest in Germany. They have balloons of many sizes to accommodate any size group.

Black Cat Cruises

Ph: 03-328 9078

www.blackcat.co.nz

Littleton Harbor and Akaroa Cruises. Littleton is the busiest port in the South Island for commercial traffic. The locals do a lot of sailboat racing in the bay on the weekends. Even with the busy, bustling port, just out by the mouth of the bay, one can see the smallest and rarest dolphins, the Hector Dolphins. They are so cute with their rounded dorsal fins and black and white faces and markings. They could be the "pandas" of the dolphins. We were lucky to view a few in late April, but there were more during the summer. When lucky, you may also be able to see the smallest penguin, the Little Blue Penguin. Besides the wildlife, we saw almost a dozen sites of interest during the cruise. Littleton is about 20 min drive out of downtown in the other direction of the Antarctic Center. If you drive or take the shuttles, you can combine this with the Christchurch Gondola ride which is between Lyttleton and CC. This company also operates a catamaran wildlife cruise from Akaroa, about a 90min drive from CC. We were sorry not to have enough time to go there, as it sounded even more interesting for wildlife and scenery.

Canterbury Museum

Ph: 03-366 5000

info@cantmus.govt.nz

Visit the following exhibitions: Antarctic heroes, Moa hunters, Tarantulas, Early city of Canterbury, Transport Gallery and more. Located in Christchurch.

Christchurch Casino

Ph: 03-365 9999

www.christchurchcasino.co.nz

see below

Christchurch Tramway

Ph: 03-366 7511

www.tram.co.nz

Tramway tour in historic central Christchurch leads to several attractions. A quaint tram with commentary that makes stops at several attractions such as Cathedral Square in front of the "i" site and aquarium, arts center, botanical garden, specialty shopping, Christchurch Casino and weekend outdoor markets.

International Antarctic Centre

Ph: 0508-736 4846

www.iceberg.co.nz

Fun, exciting & interactive experience about Antarctica, located near Christchurch. The exciting thing about the Antarctic Center is that it not only is a fun, informative, activity center that gives visitors a "feel" for the southernmost continent, but it is a real staging point for actual Antarctic expeditions! Altho located about 20 min out of downtown, there are shuttle buses from Cathedral Square, or free shuttles from the CC airport if you book at the Antarctic Shop there. It's a fascinating place that gives you a sense of the spiritual "draw" that has lured explorers like Shackleton and Scott and today's modern scientists, and gives you an idea of what they experienced and are experiencing. There is a calendar with actual entries and photos made by those in the Antarctic on that day. Your heart will swell in your breast when you view the images in the panoramic theatre with the most breathtaking views of this formidable land. Our tour guide, Lindsay, was articulate, enthusiastic, and fun, and was anxious to get his turn, as all the long-term guides actually get to experience the real thing. This award-winning attraction is worth 2-3 hours or more of visiting time.

Rangitata Rafts

Ph: 0800-251 251

www.rafts@xtra.co.nz

Full day white water rafting tours and lodge. Located in Peel Forest, South Canterbury. If you're driving, Rangitata is a 2 hr drive from CC, and you should get the well-explained directions from someone at the rafting base when you book ahead. You can also arrange round-trip transport with them out of CC as a full-day excursion. These folks have been rafting the river since ever, in fact, Alexandra's and Tussock's family has a long history in the area. The camaraderie of the staff is so strong that the guides come back year after year for the rafting season. Bob, Ben, Kohri (Japanese), Kieran, the swift-of-foot-and-shutter photographer, Cam the driver, and Justine who coordinated feeding us not once, but twice, all form such a unified team, that we immediately felt at ease, and enjoyed the whole experience, not just the excitement on the river. Their crazy humor and wry wit had us in stitches, as we were bundled and totally equipped and hustled into the van to the starting point. The scenery was wide open and magnificent on April 26, four days before the close of the season, and snow was visible on the distant mountains. This trip is perfectly designed for those who have not white water rafted (like us) before. The river starts out flat and lazy and our guides had us laughing and well trained (well, sorta, in the over-40 "masters"raft) as the river grew more and more exciting finally culminating in 4 and 5 rated rapids at the end. We never felt scared in such competent hands. Looking at the photos afterward, we couldn't believe what we had done! The day includes pre-raft lunch and after-raft hot showers, hot drinks and a BBQ with photo show of our trip! As veterans in the adventure sports (SCUBA) business, we could see the experience and thought that these folks put into this operation to have it run so smoothly, safely, with so much humor and fun! A great experience. Thumbs up rating!

Southern Encounter Aquarium & Kiwi House
Ph: 03-359 0581

www.southernencounter.co.nz

Aquariums and kiwi observation station in the heart of Christchurch. This is a beautiful aquarium right in Cathedral Square and is one of the stops on the Tramway route. The entrance is located in the "i" Site, the visitor's information center. It is not a huge facility, but is very tastefully done, and the displays are interesting and informative. The kiwi "house" is a terrarium-like set up that controls the "day-night" schedule of the kiwis so that people can view them under red light with the supervision of a docent. They are working hard to sustain the dwindling population of these shy, vulnerable "national birds" of New Zealand.

Willowbank Wild Life Reserve
Ph: 03-359 6226

www.willowbank.co.nz

Wildlife Reserve and Restaurant, outskirts of Christchurch. We had dinner at the restaurant buffet and attended the Ko Tane cultural performance, and had a quick walk around the wildlife reserve before the sun went down. The reserve is small, and seems to have a small budget, but it is pleasant, and the night tour, after the Ko Tane was the most interesting, visiting the Kea parrots and the Kiwi habitat, which was the best of those we visited. The gift shop and restaurant are very nice.

Restaurants

Christchurch Casino
Ph: 03-365 9999

www.christchurchcasino.co.nz

Casino with buffet restaurant. New Zealand Casinos will never challenge Las Vegas for glitter and glitz, but they offer the major types of gaming, and try to keep a certain standard of dress, (casual but neat is fine). Christchurch Casino is the largest and nicest in the South Island. The best part of the Casino is the buffet restaurant, The Grand Cafe. This buffet DOES challenge Las Vegas! The abundance of seafood and sheep, cattle, and venison ranches, in New Zealand is all on display in the most fabulous presentation we saw of any other buffet. The selection of cold foods and salads, hot dishes and carvery, cheese platters and fabulous desserts is staggering and the attentive personnel are continually renewing platters and tidying up the buffet area, cleaning away used plates from tables and refreshing your drink glass. Everything is upper class (except the price), and this a great place to treat yourselves to a fun evening. This is especially true on your Birthday, as the lucky birthday person will get a free meal if they show documentation. The price of \$36 NZ, when translated to US dollars makes this a treat even for your pocket book. Great value for money, as they say in New Zealand!

Tandoori Palace

Ph: 03-365 7816

www.tandooripalace.co.nz

Indian cuisine restaurants & takeouts in Christchurch. There are 5 Locations around Christchurch and one in Dunedin of these authentic East Indian restaurants. There is a cultural richness in New Zealand, especially from the Middle and Far East. The Tandoori Palaces take the freshest ingredients from NZ and use them with their exotic spices and methods to create classic curries such as masala, vindaloo, and korma, accompanied by chutneys, roti breads, or naan bread. We like fiery, but of course, they can tune down the hotness to your taste buds. Take-aways are also offered at about \$4NZ less for a main than in the restaurant.

Willowbank Wild Life Reserve Restaurant

Ph: 03-359 6226

www.willowbank.co.nz

see above

Local Transport

Christchurch Best Attractions Bus

Ph: 0800-484 485

Book at Cathedral Square Visitor Information Center

Bus service to/from several main attractions in Christchurch. Many interesting things to do in the Christchurch area are 15-20 min drive from the town center in many different directions. This bus does a circuit to get you to these attractions in the most efficient way. They have package prices for combining transport to different places.

MOUNT COOK

Highest of the mountains of the Southern Alps of the South Island, this is on the eastern side of the range in the interior, and the area is a National Park. As mentioned before, we rented a car in Christchurch to come here, because once off highway 8 between Timaru and Queenstown, the road to Mt Cook is a dead-end at the Park. Public transport schedules were too restrictive for what we wanted to do in the time we had.

Disadvantage: long drive on rural roads, and no gas station in Mt Cook. We were driving on vapors by the time we got to a gas station! Advantages: Arriving late in the day somewhere along Lake Pukaki, we saw the most awesome sunset colors reflecting off of Mt. Cook, and we could pull off the road and take a series of photos to our heart's content.

Accommodations

Mount Cook YHA

Ph: 03-435 1820

www.stayyha.com

Alpine accommodation. There are very few places to stay right at the foot of Mt Cook. Until recently the only choice was a very expensive hotel/lodge. The YHA is new and built in knotty pine with a ski lodge feel. There is even a sauna. Although it is newly built as a YHA, the lay out is not very practical at times, as the hallways and stairs are narrow and confusing, the bathrooms, showers, kitchen and dining are small, and can get crowded. The kitchen is valuable, tho because restaurant choices are limited, and at the end of April, the big Hermitage resort's dining hall was already closed for the season. Bring goods with you, as there is no town or groceries at Mt. Cook.

Activities

Glacier Explorers

Ph: 03-435 1077

www.glacierexplorers.com

Walk and boat tour on the terminal lake of the Tasman Glacier. We came to Mt Cook especially to do this trip before the close of the season, the first of May. On April 27, there was already a fine layer of ice that the boats had to break thru. The tour bus picks up at the YHA and Hermitage Hotel and other lodges in the village. We took about a 15 minute drive to the Tasman Valley trail head, and walked about 15-20 minutes to Tasman Lake, all the time getting comments and observations about glaciers, and the area from the personable young guides. When someone says Glacier Lake, we novices have a mental picture of a turquoise blue lake surrounded by white glacial ice. Imagine our surprise to see an opaque body of milky gray water surrounded by what looks like dirty snow piled up by a snow plow. The lake is caused by the terminal end of the glacier crushing and grinding the rocks to fine powder and gravel, which creates a dam. Thus the water is milky with suspended powdered rock, and the only ice that is not melted, is the ice under the protective shadow of the gravel and dirt that covers it. It's an ominous, stark scene, at first glance, but once we boarded the rigid-bottom inflatable-type boats and went out to view small icebergs, and walked on the stable ones, we could see isolated pieces of bergs looking like crystal lace, and we let the water trapped for 500 yrs frozen in the glacier, now melt in our mouths. The boats took us up to the glacier to see where the big chunks break off, and show their blue bottoms. Awesome scenery.

GREYMOUTH AND WEST COAST

The west coast is the wild coast, has no big cities, and lots of wilderness and nature, caves, canyons, winding mountain roads, and spectacular sights. The west side of the Southern Alps is accessed from the main north/south highway 6 running through this region. Franz Joseph, and Fox Glaciers are popular stops.

Accommodations

Kainga-ra YHA

Ph: 03-768 4951

www.stayya.com

Budget accommodation. This older building was originally a Marist monastery, so as you can imagine, the rooms were very basic and small, with tight hallways and stairs, and a small, but clean kitchen and dining area. No ground floor rooms. As with all YHAs, the bathroom/showers facilities were immaculately clean. Many tours and Backpacker bus services, pick-up here.

Activities

Kea West Coast Tours

Ph: 0800-532 868

www.keatours.co.nz

Tours: Punakaiki-blow holes, Shantytown-gold strike, Glaciers & Monteith's heritage trail. Located in Greymouth. This tour's schedule is built around the arrival times of the Trans Alpine train and Intercity Buses, and they pick up at any of the major accommodations in the town proper. We went on the Punakaiki & Pancake Rocks Tour, which takes you North, up the coast from Greymouth for 45kms, stopping at points of interest and view points. The Turner Track was a walk with our guide through an "ancient" rainforest, unique to this region of NZ. We walked down to a dramatic beach, and then went to the highlight of the tour, the Pancake Rocks and Blow hole area. The geology of this area is very, very unique and dramatic, getting it's name from the formations that look like towers of stacks of pancakes. The erosion of the area by the rains and the seas creates caves and tunnels and blowholes very different to anything we've seen before. The Parks Dept. has a Visitor Center, souvenir shop, and ice cream shoppe.

On Yer Bike

Ph: 0800-669 372

www.onyerbike.co.nz

Fully guided 4 WD bike tours. This tour would be good for anyone who has never ridden a quad-bike or done any off road driving. For the rest of us, it was a little too follow-the-leader. Of course, knowing how tourists sometimes have no regard for rental or hired property, the guide, who was also the mechanic, was anxious to preserve the machinery!

Wild West Adventures

Ph: 0800-223 456

www.newzealandholiday.co.nz

Dragons Cave Rafting & Chasms Underworld Whitewater Tunnel Rafting. Paul, the owner of WW Adventures has, I believe, 8 different rivers that he offers tours on. At the end of April, not every tour was offered. We were able to do the most popular, the Dragon Cave Rafting. The tour involves a walk of about 20 minutes through the native rainforest "bush", sometimes on walkways that Paul's company built over the swampy areas, to the cave entrance. As throughout NZ, the guide was very good at making the experience safe, guided, but not militaristic, and funny with his Kiwi dry wit. We scrambled, climbed, crawled and slid in the stream within the cave, and at the deepest penetration point, jumped into the river with our "rafts"(inner tubes). We drifted through the amazing glowworm chambers, gazing at living constellations that give off so much luminescence that we could see our way! Too bad the time in the cave was only a fraction of the total tour. Back at the Wild West Adventure Center, we stripped off the muddy gear that was all provided and fitted to us at the beginning, and we sank our chilled bodies into their spa/jacuzzi! AHHH! And to top it off, they served us hot muffins and hot drinks as we soaked! THAT was a class ending to a fun experience.

Restaurants

Priya Indian Cuisine

Ph: 03-768 7377

84 Tainui Street, Greymouth

svanama@hotmail.com

Restaurant & Takeaway. Greymouth is only beginning to get an influx of non-white residents, and there are few ethnic restaurants. It's interesting that many highly educated East Indians give up their profession to start restaurants here in NZ. The owner and his wife were in the medical profession originally. They were very personable and eager to please, and had good, basic Indian dishes.

FRANZ JOSEF

Accommodations

Westwood Lodge

Ph: 03-752 0112

www.westwood-lodge.co.nz

Accommodation in Franz Josef. If you really would like to indulge yourself and stay in a spacious, modern, mountain lodge atmosphere with the most gracious hosts who also prepared the most delicious salmon fillet and coffee cheese cake, contact Janet and Bill Gawn. At that time of year, the electric mattress pad, and heated towel rack made our huge king-size unit even more cozy and warm. The fire place lounge is open and airy with panoramic views but still gives off a comfortable wood-warm feel that puts you immediately at ease as Janet and Bill make you feel like long-time friends, serving you before-dinner drinks, a fabulous meal, and after dinner coffee and sweets by the fire place. What a contrast from the sailboat tropical seasonless-ness!

Activities

Franz Josef Glacier Guides

Ph : 0800-484 337

www.franzjosefglacier.com

Glacier Experience, Glacier Eco Tour, Glacier Adventure, Glacier Heli Hike. We booked the afternoon half-day Glacier Experience independently, although the Magic Bus tour company, which we took from Greymouth on the tour to FJ, will book the Glacier Experience and Heli-Hike for you as part of the Magic Bus experience. Being at the very end of summer, the glacier had receded to its furthest point for the year, so we had a good hike over the glacial moraine before getting to the point where we needed the Ice Talons and hiking boots and thick socks that are provided. The views were breathtaking, and there were waterfalls cascading down the sheer gullies of the mountains that towered all around us. Once on the ice, we were fascinated by the blue walls of ice, the cracks and crevasses, the wild and irregular ever-changing glacial terrain. The guides are constantly cutting steps in the ice, and looking out for newly emerged hazards. We walked around some really deep cracks, over crystal clear ice, and ultimately, through an "ice" blue tunnel that really was an ice slide! These folks know their business. They made it fun and safe for everyone. We were in the "National Geographic" Group, (the slow-pokes). There was the "Summit Group" (the youngest machos with no interest in other than the farthest distance they could achieve). If we'd had the budget, I imagine that the Heli- Hike would have been a real ultimate experience. If you don't like to be in a crowd, check with the company for times when the tour buses spew out their droves for tours, and choose another time. We were told by the Magic Bus driver that this company is the most reliable and well-done of the Glacier tour companies in FJ.

WANAKA

This town is located on the highway between Fox Glacier and Queenstown, where the road descends from the west side of the Southern Alps into the interior. Set on the shores of Lake Wanaka, it is a ski village in winter. Being a small community, there are not the shuttle bus services as in the larger centers, such as Christchurch. There is occasional bus service to the airport, where you will also find the Air Museum, Toy Museum, and Micro Brewery. We made the mistake to take a taxi, because in this town, they meter the miles for the fare. \$31 NZ for something like 9km was a nasty surprise. Be warned!

Accommodations

Te Wanaka Lodge
Ph: 0800-926 252

www.tewanaka.co.nz

Alpine accommodation in central Wanaka. A cute and compact modern ski chalet run by a couple who also are experienced sailing enthusiasts, Te Wanaka is a bed and breakfast that is suited for those who like to feel at home enough to serve themselves to coffee and drinks, and still be pampered with hearty breakfasts and a soak in the hot tub. The décor has a lot of sailboat prints, and publications, as the Oxleys are involved in the Lake Wanaka yacht club that organizes a lot of racing and regattas in the summer months. They are busiest at ski season, but also specialize in lodging fly fisherman who regale in the lakes and rivers in the area.

Activities / Attractions

NZ Fighter Pilots Museum
Ph: 0800-927 247

www.nzfpn.co.nz

WWII fighters and Computer flight simulators at Wanaka airport. Great place to be every even numbered year around the latter part of summer for the Warbirds Airshow. We missed it, but I'll bet seeing the museum pieces actually performing in the air must be a lot of fun, and certainly a unique experience. Ian Brodie, the man who started it all, has also put together a book on where to see all the filming locations for the Lord of the Rings movies, since he was involved in transporting the actors and film crews.

The Puzzling World of Stuart Landsborough
Ph: 03-443 7489

www.puzzlingworld.com

Unique theme of eccentricity with Illusions rooms, the Great Maze (Labyrinth) and more. At outskirts of Wanaka. Querky, fun, and crazy. This is a great place to spend some time if you are waiting for weather, or you have children or you love puzzles and curiosities. The most interesting is the story of the evolution of the place. I most enjoyed the World of Illusion, esp. the Wall of Faces where the visages never take their eyes off you! If I hadn't cheated on the Maze, I would be there still!

Wanaka Transport & Toy Museum

Ph: 03-443 8765

www.wanakatransportandtoymuseum.com

Amazing collection on display at Wanaka airport. Wanaka must have it's share of eccentrics. Never saw such an endless collection of toys, and cars and "stuff". I thought my father was bad at buying everything ever made!

QUEENSTOWN

Queenstown is one of the most touristy areas in the South Island, and little wonder as it is nestled in a valley where Lake Wakatipu meets the Kawarau and Shotover Rivers. Surrounded by towering mountains, one group, aptly named The Remarkables, Queenstown is the setting for a diversity of accommodations, adventure activities, tours of incredible scenery and views, and your choice of fun evening activities or quiet seclusion away from the center of town. This is where today's Bungy jumping got its start, and where many of the most dramatic scenes from the movies of the Lord of the Rings series were filmed. In fact, when you gaze at the surreal panoramas all around, it's hard to believe that it's natural and not a painted backdrop created in Hollywood. You can also make a day trip from here to Milford Sound to get a taste of the Fiordlands area. Plan to spend at least a week here if not more!

Accommodations

Browns Boutique Hotel

Ph: 03-441 2050

www.browshotel.co.nz

European style boutique hotel in Queenstown. A little further from the center of town than Mountvista, but close to the Gondola base, Brown's 10-unit hotel overlooks Lake Wakatipu and the terrace of each unit affords a really great view of the lake, town, and Remarkables Mtn range. On sunny days, the patio is an inviting place to soak in the sun and the view with a European breakfast. Nigel and Briget Brown are longtime Queenstown residents and skiing and sailing enthusiasts.

Ferry Hotel B&B Guest House

Ph: 03-442 2194

www.ferry.co.nz

B&B outside of the hustle & bustle of Queenstown. Ferry is a quaint, historic establishment from the hey day of mining and farming activities and is 11 km outside of Q-town and 5 km from Frankton on the Lower Shotover Rd. This a quiet get-away out in the country, offering two units for 2 couples or a family. The fireplace in the lounge was certainly welcome on the crisp autumn night that we were there. The living room feels like home with its comfy furnishings and old-time photos and memorabilia highlighting the history of the hotel. The large friendly kitchen also has a historic feel, as you can imagine warm biscuits and slabs of bacon being served with steaming coffee to dusty travelers. The ensuite room was also quaint, and we enjoyed jumping into the bed with the electric mattress pad. Glenys Reynold and husband Kevin were lured here from Australia, and she keeps the place alive with flowers and gardens.

Mountvista Boutique Hotel

Ph: 03-442 8832

www.mountvista.com

Luxury accommodation in the heart of Queenstown. The only 5 star accommodation in Queenstown proper, Mountvista IS very luxurious, and Rae McGill and Michael Kelly, are the MOST sophisticated and gracious hosts whose welcome makes one feel like a celebrity. Some of the 5 Star touches were: the heated bathroom floor, two-person tub with bath-side candles and lavender scented crèmes, soaps, bath salts, and lotions, and the incredibly soft possum-fur throw on the king bed! A boutique hotel has no restaurant on premises, but they did serve canapés and wine or drinks, in the early evening in the lounge, and a great gourmet breakfast in the morning. The Town Pier is only a beautiful 5 min walk away.

Queenstown YHA

Ph: 03-442 8413

www.stayyha.com

Budget accommodation. Q-town has a place for every budget, and the YHA came thru again with it's standard clean bathroom/showers and kitchen facilities. This is a recently built accommodation about 20 min walk along the lake side to the Town Pier. There are 2 dining areas on either side of the large kitchen. Some rooms have views of the lake, and some are far from the bathroom. If you request ahead, tour buses and the Intercity buses will pick-up here, but be sure to confirm this the night before an early AM departure.

Activities

Kawarau Jet

Ph: 0800-529 272

www.kjet.co.nz

World's first commercial jetboating. Located in Queenstown on the Main Town Pier. The Jet boat was invented by a New Zealander to allow the ranchers to get up to the remote areas on the super shallow braided river systems that sometimes sport only a handful of centimeters of water. Since the boat is pretty much riding on air, it can obtain speeds of 80-90 km/hr and slide around curves and obstacles or spin out 360's like a hockey puck! Kiwis are incurable dare devils anyway, and the Jet boat drivers are no exception. I had white knuckles from gripping the hand rail so tightly! Kawarau Jet takes you out of the lake onto the Kawarau river, then up the Shot Over, and back, with your heart in your mouth the whole time. There are many trips a day, so you can fit in a ride between activities. Try to avoid Jet boating if there is even the lightest drizzle, as even a tiny raindrop traveling at 90 km/hr can make a stinging impact!

Nomad Safaris

Ph: 0800-688 222

www.nomadsafaris.co.nz

The original 4WD Adventures: Safari of the Rings, Skippers Canyon, Macetown, The Nomad 4WD Experience. Located in Queenstown. This company had already been the major company doing tours in the mountains and river valleys all around the region when the Lord of the Rings, made Queenstown and environs famous by turning it into Middle Earth, and the Road to Mordor. They have two ½-day tours taking you to many film locations, telling you the stories to go with them. They also have tours deep into the rugged terrain of river canyons that produced the richest gold deposits in all of New Zealand, visits to a ghost town, and they'll let you try your hand at panning out some dust, or maybe even a nugget. Refreshments are included. We did the 2 Safaris of the Rings, and had one day of spectacular panoramas, and the next day of rain and a dusting of snow where we had tread the day before. One of our guides was an extra in the movie, and had great on-the-scenes stories about the cast and the filming, including a real-life drama where the actors actually pitched in filling sand bags to stem a flood that really was threatening Queenstown, (instead of opting to fly out til the nasty business was over.) This gained a lot of respect from the pioneer-spirited New Zealanders.

Queenstown Maori Concert & Feast

Ph: 03-442 8878

qtownmaori@paradise.net.nz

Dining Buffet style incl. Hangi cooked meal & Maori Concert. We love the Polynesian culture, and go to every cultural show and meal that we can. This Maori group has been in operation for over 10 yrs. The city is booming all around it, and it's a little hard to find now because there is a huge fitness center built over the top of it. For the money, it is a pretty good buffet. Cold cooked mussels, salads, soup, Maori bread, Smoked cooked hoki fish, lamb, chicken, pumpkin and veggies cooked in the underground pit (hangi-style). The performance was good, and you see the performers have a lot of fun and smile or look bug-eyed and fierce as needed. There is humor and audience involvement to add to the fun.

Real Journeys - Queenstown

Ph: 0800-656 503

www.realjourneys.co.nz

TSS Earnslaw Vintage Steamship & Walter Peak High Country Farm Tour. This was a surprisingly fun and informative trip. I was thinking that this was something for grandma and grandpa, but it really was a lot of fun to travel up the lake on a working steamship, and had an added bonus of keeping us toasty warm on that day that broke with a light dusting of snow on the surrounding peaks. The sun peeked thru occasionally giving us those qualities of light rays beaming through the dark clouds on to the glistening snow, that make us think of loftier beings than we. Watching the activities in the engine room was fascinating. Of course this 91 yr old vessel is decked out in warm wood furnishings and has a piano bar, and snack bar, and also does BBQ and Dinner Cruises combined with the Farm visit. The high country farm nestled under Walter's Peak is an actual working farm set up to give demonstrations and host meals and tea and refreshments of homemade baked sweets. The older couple who caretake, and handle the visitors from the Earnslaw are salt-of-the-earth folks with a natural built-in hospitality. The main building was immaculately manicured, surrounded by flowers blooming in profusion even as the first snow had fallen. The sheep dog demo was great. The dogs are so eager to go and so intent while working! The sheep, on the other hand, look so stupid! Different types of sheep were shown and shorn. The results were the finished products in the Wool Shop. Never knew there were so many wools for so many purposes.

Skyline Queenstown

Ph: 03-441 0101

www.skyline.co.nz

Gondola - Restaurant – Luge. There are other gondolas around New Zealand, but this probably has the most spectacular views of all. The ride up seems almost vertical and looking down gives you vertigo! Almost to the top, you see the AJ Hackett's Bungy Jumping station, and get a jumper's eye view! NOT for me! The dry Luge ride is a hair-raising race down different levels of winding twisting concrete tracks on a polyethylene cart that sits about 3 inches off the ground and has one control. There are more adventure activities, such as paragliding. For the more sane, there are walking tracks, coffee and gift shops, and a restaurant that serves a 6 course buffet every night of the year", with live entertainment. The buffet was pretty impressive, especially the cold seafoods selection. (Altho it is more expensive than the Christchurch Casino and was not as well presented or freshened.) The view of the sparkling lights of Queenstown, tho, was magic.

The Internet Depot - Queenstown

Ph: 03-442 8581

The_internet_depot@lycos.com

Internet services. Every place you go, you need one. This one has two stories of terminals! Competitive rates, a variety of complimentary services, and is in the heart of town.

The Wharf Casino in Queenstown

Ph: 03-441 1495

admin@wharf-casino.co.nz

Gaming machines, roulette, blackjack, mini baccarat & bar. Located in the same complex as the Wai Restaurant, this is a very small casino. A place to game and win (?) a few \$ if you're wait for a place at one of the restaurants in the Wharf Complex. (See Wai Restaurant, below)

Restaurants

Queenstown Maori Concert & Feast

Ph: 03-442 8878

qtownmaori@paradise.net.nz

see above

Skyline Queenstown

Ph: 03-441 0101

www.skyline.co.nz

see above

Wai Waterfront Restaurant

Ph: 03-442 5969

www.wai.net.nz

Excellent waterfront restaurant with superb seafood & NZ beef & lamb. Located right on the Main Town Pier in the Wharf Complex. This is a contemporary eating establishment that has the feel of the young corporate crowd. It's casually elegant, with a youthful management staff. The foods are what I call innovative gourmet. They take the fresh ingredients of NZ and combine flavors, spices, and herbs resulting in creative dishes. Upon reading the irresistible description in the menu of The Chef's Degustation, a 7 course (!) dinner of specialties highlighting the bounties of New Zealand, we had to have it! The menu has 2 options, the second includes a glass of NZ wines that the Chef matches to each of the courses.(\$145 NZ) We went for food only.(\$95) The meal swept across the country side of NZ opening with oysters from Bluff, thru ceviche of fish and scampi, comfit de canard (duck), sorbet of lime, venison, an incredible local cheese reminiscent of a Port Salut with caramelized onions, and a flan w/ bitter orange sauce. VERY delicious and tastefully presented portions of exactly the right size. This was one of the most unforgettable dinners of our stay in New Zealand.

MILFORD SOUND

Activities

Milford Sound Red Boat Cruises

Ph: 0800-264 536

www.redboats.co.nz

Scenic cruises on the Milford Sound. Unfortunately, our time was limited so we chose to visit Milford Sound with the hordes of other tourists on a 12 hour round-trip marathon tour from Q-town. There are many different bus companies doing this tour, but the Kiwi Experience Bus which reputedly caters to the college-aged-party-hardy, and pierced-body-parts crowd was the only to offer the Red Boat cruise on the Sound and a stop at the U/W Observatory too. The bus trip was described under the Kiwi Experience heading earlier. On May 4, 2004, Milford Sound was true to form having one of it's 3 out of 4 rainy days, but this day was particularly wet, and the mountain passes even threatened snow. The Sound was full of mist and fog and blowing rain that prevented us from seeing the tops of the surrounding peaks, but seeing the tons and tons of water pouring out of the mist down every face of every mountainside was spectacularly impressive. We had N winds up to 35 kts blasting and howling thru the Sound and were particularly glad not to be there on our boat. The Red Boat company's spacious, stable, dry boats were the way to see it and to choose to be out in it or not. We went all the way to the entrance of the Sound to get a feel for the Tasman Sea, (which sent in huge swells), then came back along the other side of the Sound, passing literally into Stirling Falls which was thundering 10's of thousands of gals of water/min engulfing the boat in swirling stinging mist. It was incredible to see some of the smaller cascades actually falling UP as they were caught by up-drafts of air in mid-descent and blown back up the mountainside! WOW! Even the waterfalls in New Zealand bungy! 2hr 45min tour.

Milford U/W Observatory

Ph: 03-249 9442

www.milforddeep.co.nz

Interesting stop if you are interested in Marine biology. The marine life in the Sound is unique because of the volumes of fresh water that cover the salt water and block out the natural light so that some marine forms such as black coral and red coral which usually grow at much greater depths are found at shallow depths. The viewing tube descends about 10 meters deep from the floating platform at the edge of the sound.

DUNEDIN

I really like this city with its Scottish roots and old historic buildings and The Octagon at city center. This was our base for a variety of activities very different from one another. There was a unique train trip, viewing of rare and endemic marine life, a trip along the Catlin coast between Invercargill (the southern-most city) and Dunedin, the Speight's Ale Brewery tour, and activities in the city such as indoor games and outdoor lunch concerts at the Octagon.

Accommodations

Dunedin YHA

Ph: 03-474 1919

www.stayyha.com

Budget accommodation. This was the old Stafford Gables building, and like many old buildings, is a maze and labyrinth of stairs and hallways and funky irregular shaped areas. We had the "honeymoon" room with luminescent hearts on the ceiling and a great view if you stood on your toes to reach the window! Ample kitchen, but tiny dining room, small rooms, short toilet doors, but huge showers! Rooftop picnic table with a great view of Dunedin. And like all YHAs, facilities are very clean and sanitary.

Grandview Bed & Breakfast

Ph: (64) 03-474 9472

nzgrandview@msn.com

Accommodation in Dunedin. As the name implies, this B&B is located on a hill overlooking the city. It is a huge old rambling house with a décor that is a crazy, fun mish mash of colors and styles. There are no ensuite rooms at the moment, but if the place is not full, you may be placed in a room where you are the only ones using that bathroom. Steve, Owner/Manager is continually updating and renovating, and hopes to offer different classes of rooms. He is an ex-referee of boxing from Australia, and has a lot of boxing décor, and colorful stories to tell while you relax in one of the two lounges.

Nature Guides Otago / Nisbet Cottage

Ph: 03-454 5169

www.nznatureguides.com

Guided Wildlife Tours & Superior Accommodation at the beginning of the Otago peninsula. Hildegard Lubcke, and her husband Ralf have been nature guides with over a decade of experience. Their specialty is to provide accommodations at their cozy Nisbet Cottage bed and breakfast, and set up customized nature tours for small groups with emphasis on personalizing these for greater intimacy with the rare, and sometimes, shy, wildlife. Hildegard is very savvy about what it takes to make a combination like this work. She pays attention to details such as the very best guides, comfortable vehicles, and those special touches in the accommodations, such as a complimentary glass of NZ wine with nibbles in the evening.

Activities / Attractions

Catlins Coaster - Dunedin

Ph: 021-682 461

www.catlinscoasters.co.nz

Wildlife encounters, bush and beach walks. NZ caters to tourists with limited time. This is another one of its 12 hr do-it-all-in-a-day tours. We were picked-up at our accommodation and taken to the bus terminal by our driver/guide, Steve. On looking back, this trip would be better done as a one-way, as a scenic leg to get from Invercargill to Dunedin, because the real "tour" only started once we were at the Museum in Invercargill at around 11:30 AM. From there, we took roads along the Catlin Coast area with its dramatic lonely coast, native bush, and stories of the rugged, individualistic "Southern Man", the spirit of the people who carved their living out of this harsh environment. Also saw petrified remains of ancient species of trees in the coastal rocks. Steve was interesting because his family had roots in this area and he has boyhood stories of life in this isolated outback. We dilly-dallied a little too long in some places and were too late to see the penguins doing their hoppety-hop back up the hundred foot cliffs to their nesting sites. Luckily we saw them on the previous tour. We did see fur seals and the lighthouse in action, as it was dark by then. The only draw back is that the distance to travel and the sights to see is so great, not much time can be spent at any one thing. Be sure to bring a lunch or buy makings in Invercargill 'cause there is NO place in the Catlins.

Dunedin Casino

Ph: 0800-477 4545

www.dunedincasino.co.nz

see below

Elm Wildlife Tours / Monarch Wildlife Cruises – Otago Peninsula from Dunedin

Ph: 0800-356 563

www.elmwildlifetours.co.nz

www.wildlife.co.nz

Close encounters with nature: penguins, sea lions, fur seals and plenty of native birds. We were picked-up in front of the info center at the Octagon. We made a half-day tour that combined the services of these two companies and we recommend this combination if you have only one day available. Elm can make all the arrangements. Elm's bus picked us up and drove us out to the Otago Peninsula. We observed some wetland birds, then were dropped off at a small pier to catch the Monarch boat which took us out to Tairoa Head. Even tho not nesting season, we did see 3-4 Royal Albatross chicks, then went out to sea about 1/2 to 3/4 mi and saw 2 more species of Albatross and a tiny Blue Penguin floating on the waves. There were some fur seals at the base of the headland under the light house. It was a nice little cruise for an hr. Good wind/rain jackets and auto-focus binoculars were provided. Narration was enthusiastic. Back with Elm, we drove to a private farm on the coast where we walked to blinds to observe fur seal pups, and then along the beach at dusk to see the Hooker Sea Lions waking up to go fishing, and the rare yellow-eyed penguins exiting the sea and waddling,

hopping and climbing up the steep hills back to the roosting sites after a day of hard fishing. They are really adorably cute, and we were lucky to get within almost touching distance of a couple for up-close photos. We also got a close-up view of a tiny Blue Penguin hiding in a hole. Good wildlife viewing and ocean views. The guide really knew his timing to catch that fleeting moment when the sea lions and penguins make their moves. We finished the tour back in town at 6:30.

Laser Force - Dunedin

Ph: 03-474 9179

laserforce@paradise.net.nz

Live action laser game, bowling, mini-golf and more. Great rainy day or group activity for families. The Laser Force game is fun for a group as it is a multi-level maze in which folks chase or stalk each other and try to bombard them with as many laser "shots" as possible. Mini-golf and mini-bowling are fun for the more sedate!

Nature Guides Otago / Nisbet Cottage

Ph: 03-454 5169

www.nznatureguides.com

see above

Speights Brewery Tours

Ph: 03-477 9489

www.speights.co.nz

Brewery tours. Speights has taken the Brewery Tour to new heights. Not only do you see the brewery at work, but you learn about the history of beer making and the historical heritage of Speights as it grew along side New Zealand's blossoming into a nation in it's own right. Their image and ad campaigns are so affective that The Southern Man commercials have made it's Bogart-type figure as well known as Spuds McKensie in the States. New Zealanders can quote every commercial. The beers are dam—d good too! They have several lights and darks. And even a Speights Ale Ice Cream!

Taieri Gorge Railway

Ph: 03-477-4449

www.taieri.co.nz

Excursion train in the beautiful Taieri Gorge. Departure from Dunedin Railway Station. As usual, we arrived by Intercity Bus just minutes before the 12:30 daily departure of the Taieri Gorge train. By luck, the bus station was just minutes from the Railway Station. Murray, who had been forewarned of our tight arrival by e-mail greeted us graciously and expeditiously got us on the train with Joe, our conductor/guide personally showing us to our car, a newer one, well appointed with settee-type seating. We were able to have a nice lunch in the snack-bar car, (Very reasonable prices) with Speight's Ale ice cream for dessert! The day was gorgeous and once out of Dunedin, the sights got more and more dramatic and wild as we progressed up the Gorge. The autumn sunlight angles and colors were stunning and highlighted the rugged scenery which was enhanced even more by the fine narration. We made about 4-5 stops for photos, and saw a splendidly isolated x-ing station (now a quaint holiday home), crossed impossibly high viaducts (bridges), and got

more and more great photos, crescendo-ing at The Notches, the most breath-holding of passages through rock formations seemingly barely holding on the hillside above the Gorge so-o far below. Reconstruction of the real-life Otago Central Railways line so vital in the pioneering days, has opened up 45 km of the route, and the now privately run Taieri Gorge train does a round-trip every afternoon. We highly recommend it!

Restaurants

Dunedin Casino

Ph: 0800-477 4545

www.dunedincasino.co.nz

Casino with restaurant a la carte. Located in the former Grand Hotel of the late 1880's era, which has been restored as the new Southern Cross Hotel, the casino has the architectural grandeur of the times, with it's "sweeping grand staircase gilded light fittings...and glass dome roof". The emphasis is on the slot machines, but there are also table games such as roulette, black jack, baccarat, and Tai Sai. The Grand Café offers very nice meals for very reasonable prices: Light meals: \$11-13, Regular meals: \$12.50-\$19.50, Wines: \$5-6/glass. We ate there twice!

The Ale House

Ph: 03-471 9050

thealehouse@xtra.co.nz

Speights Brewery, Dunedin

Bar & Restaurant We took the 7:00 evening brewery tour, so we had dinner at the Ale House to get a pre-view. The place has an up-dated warm, wood, feel of an olden drinking establishment. The menu was very reasonably priced and the dishes were well presented and nicely proportioned. Each dish had a suggested Speights beer to accompany it. I don't normally like the taste of beer, but I did like the dark beer.

GENERAL REFERENCES

www.purenz.com

Check it out! They even propose driving itineraries!

www.newzealand.com

www.tourisminfo.govt.nz

www.birdingnz.co.nz

www.noonsite.com

Check the latest info on NZ including Marine Services and Shore Services. Updated daily!

www.ssca.org

Check the latest Commodore's Bulletins for articles about NZ. If you are not a member yet, you can join on-line.