

New Zealand - 2010

Arrival on: Saturday, January 23rd – 11:30 A.M. – Eastern Time Zone (GMT-5)

Sunday, January 24th – 5:30 A.M. – New Zealand Time (GMT+12 +1 DST Offset)

Some information about New Zealand and details of our trip. For those of you in the Eastern Time zone – we're 18 hours ahead of you. (Or think of it as +1 day – 6 hours) The map to your left shows the route of our trip. The calendar below shows our schedule, hotels, and planned activities.



2010 NZ Vacation

Sunrise/Sunset: 6:30AM/8:30PM



Average Hi/Lo Temperatures: North Island 75/62 South Island 71/54

<p>Sun. 1/24 <u>Auckland</u> -Arrive 5:25AM -Explore the city on our own</p> <p>Meals: D Htl: Langham-(2)</p>	<p>Mon. 1/25 <u>Auckland</u> -America's Cup Sailing Experience</p> <p>Meals: B Htl: Langham-(2)</p>	<p>Tues. 1/26 <u>Auckland to Omapere</u> -Kauri Museum -Waipoua Forest -Hokianga Harbor Cruise</p> <p>Meals: B & HD Htl: Copthorne</p>	<p>Wed. 1/27 <u>Omapere to Bay of Islands</u> -Treaty Grounds -Cruise to Cape Brit Lighthouse and Hole in Rock</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Copthorne-(2)</p>	<p>Thurs. 1/28 <u>Bay of Islands</u> -Scenic Free Choice</p> <p>Meals: B Htl: Copthorne-(2)</p>	<p>Fri. 1/29 <u>Bay of Islands & Whangarei to Auckland</u> -Free time in Whangarei</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Langham</p>	<p>Sat. 1/30 <u>Auckland to Rotorua</u> -Mt. Eden -Goldfields train -Dairy Farm -Whakarewarwa Village Tour</p> <p>Meals: B & HL Htl: Novotel-(2)</p>
<p>Sun. 1/31 <u>Rotorua</u> -Scenic Free Choice</p> <p>Meals: B Htl: Novotel-(2)</p>	<p>Mon. 2/1 <u>Rotorua to Napier</u> -Huka Falls -Wairakei Valley -Lake Taupo -Napier Tour</p> <p>Meals: B & HD Htl: Te Pania</p>	<p>Tues. 2/2 <u>Napier to Wellington</u> -Tour of Te Papa Museum</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Copthorne Oriental Bay</p>	<p>Wed. 2/3 <u>Wellington to Marlboro Sound to Christchurch</u> -Ferry to South Isl. -Picton -Kaikoura Seals</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Millennium</p>	<p>Thurs. 2/4 <u>TranzAlpine To Franz Josef Glacier</u> -Southern Alps -Hokitika -Franz Josef Glacier</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Waionui Forest Retreat</p>	<p>Fri. 2/5 <u>F.J. Glacier to Queenstown</u> -Jet Boat on Haast River</p> <p>Meals: B Htl: (3 days) St. Moritz</p>	<p>Sat. 2/6 <u>Queenstown</u> -Scenic F. Choice Meals: B & HD Htl: St. Moritz-(3)</p>
<p>Sun. 2/7 <u>Queenstown</u> -Explore Queenstown on our own</p> <p>Meals: B Htl: St. Moritz-(3)</p>	<p>Mon. 2/8 <u>Queenstown to Milford Sound to Te Anau</u> -Fiordland Park -Milford Sound Overnight Cruise</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: HMS Milford</p>	<p>Tues. 2/9 <u>Te Anau to Dunedin</u> -Lake Te Anau Cruise -Glowworm Caves</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: So. Cross</p>	<p>Wed. 2/10 <u>Dunedin to Lake Tekapo</u> -Dunedin City Tour -Moeraki Boulders</p> <p>Meals: B & D Htl: Peppers Resort</p>	<p>Thurs. 2/11 <u>Lake Tekapo to Christchurch</u> -Good Shepherd Church -Christchurch city tour</p> <p>Meals: B & HD Htl: Millennium</p>	<p>Fri. 2/12 <u>Christchurch</u> -Scenic Free Choice -Depart ChstCh. At 4:30PM -Arrive L.A. At 10:30AM</p>	



New Zealand Trip – Day 1 – Friday January 22nd

Today is the start of our three week vacation/tour of New Zealand, and today will be a grueling travel day!



(Shadow's Breakfast Bar – fitted with everything he might need for three weeks)



The Elvings (Marcia and Jim) depart Albany at 10:30AM EST on a Southwest flight, changing planes in Las Vegas (where Marcia won 50 cents in a slot machine) and arrive in rainy Los Angeles at 3:30PM PST, four hours before the flight to New Zealand. The Tinkas (Marie and Kal) have a more exciting start. Their flight out of Dayton is delayed in departing, and they miss their connection in Dallas and are then booked on a later flight from Dallas to LAX. Marcia and I board the flight to Auckland, wondering if we will each have an extra seat to spread out on, but the Tinkas finally board our plane, about 15 minutes prior to take-off. We now wonder if their checked bags will make it!

Our flight from Los Angeles to Auckland, New Zealand is on a full Air New Zealand 747. It's a fourteen hour flight, all in darkness, as we will be landing in

Auckland at about 5AM (which will be 11AM EST in the USA). We have tried to catch some naps.....the service on the plane has been excellent and we all seem to be feeling well as the plane nears Auckland.

Now, New Zealand is in the South Pacific, about 1000 miles to the east of Australia. Coming to New Zealand, we not only cross the equator (so it will be summer time on our vacation!), but we cross the International Date Line, so we will be a day ahead of the USA. We left LA on a Friday night and land in Auckland, 14 hours later, on a Sunday morning.

New Zealand is about the size of California, and consists of two large main islands. We will be joining a guided motor coach tour group for “Scenic Tours 20 Day Royal New Zealand” tour, spending 10 days traveling the North Island and 10 days on the South Island.

We land in Auckland at 5AM, collect all of our luggage (yes, the Tinka’s made it), and are quickly transferred to our 5 Star hotel in Auckland, the Langham, which has rooms ready for us to check into.

We are safely in New Zealand and will do some independent exploring of the city, today.

New Zealand Trip – Day 2 - Sunday January 24th

The Elvings and the Tinkas check into our Auckland Hotel at 6:30AM after a very long (about 30 hours) travel time from the USA. We were delighted to find that the Langham Hotel has rooms ready for an early check in. We are determined to try to “stay awake” today, so as to quickly adjust to the time differences and the long travel time. We each take a couple of hours to cleanup and unpack, as we will be in this hotel for two nights, then meet in the lobby at 8:45AM to start some independent exploration of the downtown area of Auckland. We all agree that the rooms in the Langham are most excellent.

We know from our trip research that New Zealand was first inhabited by migrating Polynesians, sometime between 1000 and 1400 AD. The “western discovery” of New Zealand was by Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in the 1640s, and the English explorer James Cook was the first to set foot on the soil of New Zealand during his first voyage around the world in 1770. English settlers started arriving in the early 1800’s. The population of New Zealand today is “only” 4,400,000 people. About 80% are “Anglos”, mostly descendents of the original English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish settlers, with the remaining 20% being descendents of the original inhabitants (called the Maori) and other immigrants from all over Asia.....mostly from Polynesia, Korea, India, and China. English and Maori are the two official languages.

Auckland is by far the largest city in New Zealand, with almost half of the total population of NZ residing in Auckland and its surrounding suburbs. Sitting on a narrow stretch of land on the North Island, with harbors on both the west (Tasman Sea) and east (Pacific Ocean) Auckland is called “The City of Sails”.



The Elvings and Tinkas leave the hotel and walk for about half an hour to reach the Auckland harbor area on the Pacific Ocean.....Auckland is very quiet at this time on a Sunday morning. We spend some time looking at the many yachts in “Viaduct Harbor” including two of the original America’s Cup racers that were built for New Zealand when they first won the America’s Cup in 1995. We are excited that we will be sailing on one of them tomorrow!

We next buy tickets for a 1-1/2 hour boat tour of the Auckland Harbor area, which takes us through the two large anchorages in the harbor, under the Harbor Bridge, past the NZ Navy base, and past several islands, one of which is a nature preserve, where we stop and explore for a few minutes, all the time getting good commentary from the ship’s Captain and enjoying many fine views of the boats sailing through the harbor and of the Auckland skyline. Unfortunately, the cool and cloudy weather that has prevailed during the first half of the New Zealand summer continues. Temperatures are only in the upper 60s with only occasional sun.



After the boat tour, we find a good restaurant for our lunch and then walk back to our hotel. By now it’s 2PM and we are all feeling quite fatigued from our recent lack of sleep, so we retire to our rooms to rest up for the upcoming initial meeting with our Tour Director and the rest of our tour group.

We each take about a two hour nap and are mostly refreshed when we leave our room for the 6:30PM initial meeting with our tour group. On the way down in the elevator, we introduce ourselves to another couple and find that they are part of our tour group.....Caroline and George from Kingston, Ontario.



We have a half-hour meeting with our tour guide. She is Valerie Francis, a lady from Vancouver Canada. We learn that this is about the 40th time she has led this tour, and we can tell from her enthusiasm that she believes it to be a great tour and a wonderful country. By now, the weather has cleared up and there’s not a cloud in the sky. Valerie tells us that due to New Zealand’s long, thin shape and the ocean currents and sea breezes, the weather can and does change quickly. Weather forecasts are rarely accurate more than one day out. It looks like there are 40+ folks in our group, with the majority being from England, but with some Australians and Canadians. The four of us are the only Americans.

We next enjoy an excellent buffet dinner in the hotel restaurant. We invite Caroline and George to join us at our table for six, and learn that Caroline toured New Zealand last year with two of her lady friends (with a different tour company) and liked it so much she is doing it again this year with her husband.

After dinner we retire for what we hope will be a good night of sleep so that we can get adjusted to the overseas travel.



Replica of Kon Tiki



Unusual flower

New Zealand Trip - Day 3 – Monday January 25th

This is our first “full day” in New Zealand; i.e., we woke up in-country. At 7:30AM we meet for a great buffet breakfast at our hotel and all agree that we feel much better after about ten hours of sleep.



At 9AM the Elvings and Tinkas meet for some more independent exploration of Auckland. A short walk from our hotel takes us to a most beautiful park, “Auckland Domain”. Now, the weather forecast for today did not look to be the best, but, so far the weather is perfect.....warm and sunny. The park is huge, with gardens, ponds and athletic fields. We first walk through the park, past gardens and unique trees, to the “Wintergarden”. These are two large exhibit halls, left over from a 1930 exhibition, that have been turned into greenhouses. The first houses tropical plants and the second more temperate climate plant. A garden connects the two greenhouses, and we spend an enjoyable time looking at the plants and flowers.





Then, it's on to the "Auckland War Memorial Museum", sitting high on a hill in Domain Park, looking down on the Auckland Harbor. We spend an hour and a half exploring the museum, which has wonderful exhibits on the Maori people, ancient Polynesia, the development of New Zealand, New Zealand geography and animals, and a fascinating exhibit of New Zealanders' participation in wars (including a restored Spitfire and a Zero airplane). We all agree this is one of the best museums we have seen!

At 12:45PM the Elving, Tinkas and two other couples from our tour meet our Tour Director to go to our "Scenic Free Choice" activity. Several times during this tour we will have a choice of activities, at no extra charge. The "Scenic Free Choices" for today are a visit to the Auckland Sky Tower, Auckland Harbor Cruise (which we did on our own, yesterday), a visit to an aquarium, a trip to explore an offshore nature preserve, a city tour, or the America's Cup Sailing Experience. We have chosen the last one.

We walk from our hotel to the harbor (a different experience on a busy Monday vs. our walk over the same area on Sunday morning). At key intersections in Auckland, the lights will go red for all traffic and green for pedestrians, and you can cross the intersections diagonally. We are careful when we cross roads, as they drive on the left hand side of the road, and we have to be sure that we are looking in the right direction.



At 2PM we board “NZ41”, an actual America’s Cup racing sailboat that competed for New Zealand in 1995, the year that they first won the America’s Cup. For two hours we sail to all parts of the Auckland Harbor and out towards the Pacific Ocean. We man the “grinders” to raise and lower the sails and take turns manning the helm (the steering wheel), all under the good directions of the four man crew. This day has turned out to be perfect, weather-wise, with brilliant sunshine, highs in the upper 70s, and a nice breeze that allows us to hit speeds of 12 knots (about 20 mph). These boats are very stable, as we learn that the keel weigh 20 tons, and the rest of the boat (everything above the waterline, including the massive mast) weigh only 6 additional tons.....you’re not going to capsize one of these! This is a most fun and memorable experience!





Next, at 4:30PM, the Elvings and Tinkas board a ferry for a short ride across the bay to the town of Devonport, which features quaint houses, art galleries, beaches and several high hills (actually old extinct volcano cones). We walk through town, then to North Point and up the high hill that dominates the end of the peninsula. From there we have dramatic views of the Pacific, Auckland Harbor, and the Auckland skyline. Also on the hill are old artillery and cannon installations from WW2. We walk back into Devonport and find a nice Italian restaurant for an excellent dinner, returning by ferry to Auckland at 8PM and catching the hotel shuttle from downtown back to the Langham hotel.



We all agree that this has been the most perfect day. Tomorrow we board our motor coach for the first time, and head north.

New Zealand Trip – Day 4 – Tuesday January 26th

Today is our first day on the motor coach on our tour of New Zealand. Bags packed and outside our door at 7AM, down to breakfast, then on to our motor coach at 8AM. Our group of 42 fits easily on the coach with a few extra seats to spare. We find the seats quite comfortable and there's plenty of leg room, storage areas for carry ons, and huge glass windows for good views. The overall dimensions of this "Scandia" motor coach seem a little narrower (especially the aisle) vs. the coaches we've had in Europe, but we later realize this makes sense for the twisty two-lane roads that we will always be on when outside of the immediate areas around the major cities.

We leave Auckland and head north. We will be spending the next four days (first in Omapere, then in the Bay of Islands area) in the very northern part of New Zealand's North Island. This is the area of New Zealand that's closets to the equator, hence the warmest; almost never experiencing freezes. As we head north, we are surprised to see that Roger, our coach driver, handles most the commentary on the local sites and the history of New Zealand, while our Tour Director, Valerie, does a great job covering all of the trip logistics. We like this, as Robert is most informative, has a great sense of humor and a wonderful New Zealand accent.

Auckland, on a workday morning, is very busy with traffic, but as we exit the suburb traffic quickly falls off and we have a pleasant ride through lush, green country before arriving at our first stop at 10AM, the Kauri Museum. Now, the Kauri is a huge tree (second in size only to the North American redwood) and used to cover most of the North Island. The English settlers cut down many of the Kauri trees for building materials, export, and to clear land for farming. Today, only 4% of the original trees remain. The museum is fascinating, with exhibits of life in the mid-1800s, the equipment used to harvest the Kauri tree and clear the land, and examples of the products (furniture and many other types of objects) made from the beautiful wood of the Kauri tree.





After lunch, we head further north, arriving at the Waipoua Kauri National Forest, the last preserve of the Kauri tree. Here we are met by two local Maori natives, who walk us to the largest remaining Kauri tree, which is over 2000 years old. We now experience a great presentation by the Maoris, who describe with passion, humor (and song) the story of the Kauri tree and its importance to their culture. A most enjoyable time, deep in the semi-tropical forest.



We next head north, up the only road (only recently paved), through winding, hilly country, arriving at the small town of Omapere at about 4PM. Omapere sits in a nice setting where a large river empties into the Tasman sea on New Zealand's west coast. We are taken on a one hour boat tour of the harbor (which has only recently been added to this tour's activities.....and could use some improvements!), before arriving at our hotel for the night, the Copthorne.



This hotel is great, sitting right on the shore of the river, facing the Tasman Sea. The Elvings and Tinkas have adjoining rooms on the first floor. The rooms are very large, with a double veranda looking out on the water. We enjoy the great views and the short walk from our veranda to the water! The weather today has been fine, with temperatures in the upper 70s with clouds and sun.

At 7PM our group meets for a drink before walking down to an open, tented, area near the beach for our “highlight dinner”.



Dinner is a traditional Maori “hangi feast”, consisting of meats, potatoes, stuffing and other foods that have been cooked in earthen pots, underground, for four hours. The food is great, but the surroundings are even better. We are sitting at tables of 10 each, with views of the sun setting on the bay, and an acoustic band (a trio of women with lovely mellow voices) playing for us during dinner. The Elvings and Tinkas sit at a table with Caroline and George from Canada, and a nice couple from Australia and another from England.....very interesting conversations. The sun doesn’t set here until well after 9PM, and it’s well after that we retire for bed. Another great day.



New Zealand Trip – Day 5 – Wednesday January 27th

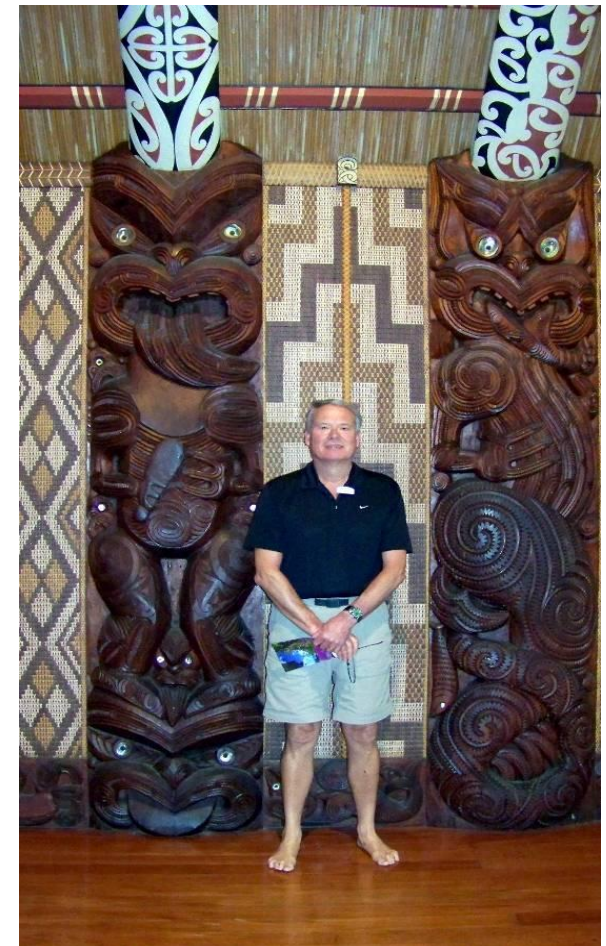
I wake up early this morning and go out on our veranda at the Copthorne hotel in Omapere (in shorts and a tee shirt) at 5:45AM to start to write yesterdays trip e-mail. There's not a cloud in the sky, and I walk out towards the shore of the river and gaze up at the stars of the Southern Hemisphere. Later, as I write the e-mail, I enjoy watching the hills and water brighten as the sun rises. Life is good!

Bags out at 8AM, down to breakfast, then on the motor coach at 9AM for a relatively short (two hour) ride from the far western side of New Zealand to the far eastern side.....we are in the very narrow part of the northern part of the North island of New Zealand.....the part of this country closest to the equator. We drive on a narrow, winding two lane roads through semi-tropical forests and small farms. Most of the farms are raising cattle and a few are raising sheep. Our driver, Roger, tells us we'll see more sheep when we go south, and that the farmers in the north have a reputation of being more "laid back", hence the poor appearance of many of the farms. He also tells us that many of them also grow a "cash crop"marijuana.....which could contribute to the look! Robert also talks about some of the interesting early history regarding the English discovery and inhabitation of New Zealand. The scenery is great!



of the early history of New Zealand, as it was an area heavily populated with Maori when the English first started arriving in the early 1800s and established their first settlements. Geographically, the Bay of Islands is stunning.....a huge bay dotted with 144

Shortly before 11AM we arrive at the Bay of Islands area of northern New Zealand. This is the area that holds much



islands of varying sizes. A local Maori guide joins our motor coach and gives commentary as we drive by some of the key historical spots and features of the area. Then, she leads us on a tour of “Waitangi Treaty

Grounds”, the most important historic site for the New Zealanders. We learn that this is the site where the representatives of the English crown and the Maori chiefs



signed the agreement in 1840 creating the country of New Zealand under the sovereignty of England but with protections for the native Maori people. We see many interesting exhibits, the original “Treaty House” and reproductions of life in the 1840s, Te Whare Runanga (a Maori meeting house), and several original Maori war canoes (carved from the trunks of the huge Kauri tree), including the largest ever made.....over 40 yards long and able to carry 180 paddlers and warriors.



We are next dropped off in the town of Paihia for lunch. The Elvings and Tinkas find a nice outdoor café and order pizza. The weather is great.....clear skies with a few clouds and warming into the upper 70s.

At 1:30PM our tour group boards a large, nice sightseeing ship for what we think will be a highlight of our tour, a three hour cruise of the Bay of Islands. We journey out into the bay, on a perfect weather day, enjoying the commentary of the ship's captain as we go past small settlements and many islands. About one-half hour into the cruise, the captain announces that they have sighted a pod (a school) of bottlenose dolphins. For the next half hour we enjoy amazing sights as a group of thirty dolphin frolic and swim alongside and around our boat. There are at least two baby dolphins in the group, usually swimming between their mother and an "aunt". Our captain says, judging by their size, they may have been born in the past 24 or 48 hours! It is great sight, and other boats join us in watching the dolphins, all being careful to follow the strict New Zealand rules concerning boat traffic around dolphins.....but, the dolphins sure look to enjoy being around boats! We leave the dolphins and cruise out another 10 miles to the end of the southern piece of land that defines the Bay of Islands, Cape Brett. Here we view the Cape Brett Lighthouse, and then the famous "Hole In The Rock", a natural tunnel through Motukokako, a rocky island. Our large boat approaches the tunnel, and then carefully powers through it, with only feet to spare on each side of our boat. This is something that they can only attempt on relatively calm days, like today. We next travel back to the Paihia docks, arriving at 4:15PM after a great trip.



Next, it's on to our hotel for the next two nights, the Copthorne. While we were on our cruise, our coach driver went ahead and had our luggage taken to our assigned rooms and picked up our room keys, which were handed out to us as we boarded the motor coach for the ride to our hotel. This way, we walk right to our rooms with no delay, and have our baggage already in the room. They followed the same procedure at our last hotel, and we find this a nice service that we've not enjoyed on any of our other tours.

The Copthorne is a first class hotel, located right on the shore of the Bay of Islands. The rooms are large, each with a veranda or balcony overlooking the water (the Elvings and Tinkas have adjoining rooms on the first floor). The hotel also has a nice pool and spa area. We meet at 7PM for an excellent buffet dinner in the hotel restaurant. We sit at a table with two couples from England that we had not previously dined with, and had great conversations. After dinner we take a walk along the shoreline (the hotel is right next to the beautiful "Waitangi Treaty Grounds"), watching the stars appear. Then off to bed.....tomorrow's our "Scenic Free Choice" activity day in Bay of Islands.

New Zealand Trip - Day 6 - Thursday January 28th

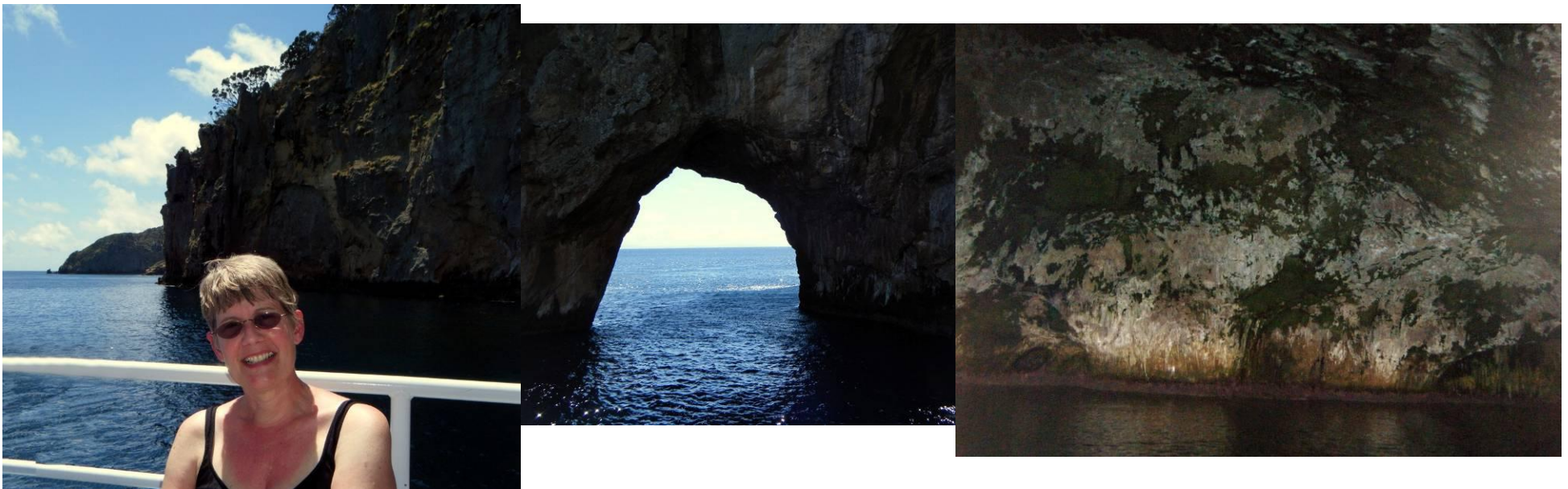
Today will be our second day in the Bay of Islands area of Northern New Zealand, so no need to pack up our bags this morning.

This will be a "Scenic Free Choice" day, where we can choose a special activity, the cost of which was included in our original tour price (hence, no extra payments, as is normal on the other tours we've been on for these "optionals"). Marie and Kal have chosen to "Sail on the Edge"they will spend several hours sailing on New Zealand's fastest commercial catamaran, a 70 footer, with island stopover activities and a Kiwi BBQ lunch. Marcia and Jim have chosen "A Perfect Day", which is a motor boat trip to Poor Knights island, off the NZ coast, which is a wild life preserve said to have the best tropical aquatic life in New Zealand; kayaking and snorkeling will be available, plus lunch. We picked these, based on research we did on the internet and our Tour Director's descriptions. The other activities, which we did not chose, were Bay Fishing, a tour of the nearby town of Russell, a lunch cruise in the harbor, a 4-wheel drive trip to the very northern tip of NZ (Cape Reinga), Swim with the Dolphins, or 18 holes of golf. Interestingly, it appears that these activities are pretty evenly split up among our group of 42 travelers.



Marie and Kal (and four other couples from our group) catch the 9:30 hotel shuttle for the short trip to the Paihia harbor, where they board the huge catamaran. With only about 25 passengers, it was not crowded. They sail at 10AM, and return just after 4PM. In addition to the sailing activities, the boat stops on a small island for lunch, where they have two hours to eat, explore, swim, or snorkel. They very much enjoy the activity. They hiked up a spongy grass area to the high point of the mountain for spectacular views. Today has been another great weather day.....mostly sunny, high 70s. We all are being careful to minimize/avoid sunburn by wearing hats and lot of sunscreen. The Kiwis (i.e., the New Zealanders) claim that there is a hole in the ozone above their country, and that it's really easy to get a sunburn.

Marcia and Jim are picked up by a small shuttle bus at 9AM (the other couple from of tour group that was to join us has to cancel, as the wife feels ill). We have a relatively long (one hour and fifteen minute) ride to a small marina at Tutukaka, south of the Bay of Islands, but we find the trip enjoyable, as the scenery and views are great and Gerry, our shuttle driver (a retired local, originally from England) is a most interesting fellow, and we have a stimulating conversation about New Zealand and the world for most of the trip. We board a nice "dive boat" (with a platform on the rear for easy water entrance) at 11AM and depart for a 45 minute trip, through some pretty good swells, to the Poor Knights islands. These islands, the remains of an ancient volcano cone, are uninhabited and a nature preserve. Our boat is not crowded, as we are carrying only about half of its capacity of 50 people. We anchor and Marcia and I first enjoy lunch and then kayak for a while. We had chosen not to rent wet suits, and found the water (probably around 68 to 70 degrees) just fine for the half-hour or so of snorkeling that we next did. We are in a great area.....calm water, sea caves, shallow, with many colorful fish. I use the waterproof camera that my mother gave me for Christmas and get some great photos! At 2:30PM we raise anchor and depart for a trip around the islands. Not far from where we were snorkeling, our boat enters "Riko Riko", the world's largest sea cave. Inside a relatively small entrance is a mammoth cavern covered from top to bottom with moss and lichen. The acoustic effects are amazing.....a toot of the boat's horn echoes for a long time.



We exit the cave and resume our trip around the islands. Next, Marcia "becomes famous" when she spots what she believes may be dolphins. The Captain makes for the target, and we learn we have found a large manta ray.....these are apparently hard to find (our Captain has not seen one since last summer) and he radios other boats about the discovery and one soon joins us. We follow the ray for some time, watching him roll over and raise the tips of his wings above water. When he wants food he flips over to his back (making a gorgeous turquoise reflection on the water) as he

scoops food into his mouth. We then return a little late to the marina, due to the time we spent following the ray, and find word has spread of our boat's sighting! Gerry and his shuttle get us back to our hotel at 5:45PM after this great activity.

We quickly clean up and join the Tinkas for the mile and a half walk along the south shore, into the town of Paihi, where we have very good dinner at a circular restaurant built on a pier on the shore next to the marina. Another great day.

New Zealand Trip – Day 7 – Friday January 29th

We finish up our two night stay in the Bay of Islands with a late start...bags packed and out at 9AM, then breakfast, and onto the motor coach at 10AM.



We've enjoyed our stay at the Copthorne Hotel, but have been amazed at the number of white-tailed rabbits we've seen. We've finally figured out that they live under a large, enclosed wood deck that runs the length of our side of the hotel. We see them at all times of the day.....sometimes as many as a dozen in a small area...and of all ages. This is an example of the problem New Zealand has, due to its unique geographic location. Prior to the Maori habitation of New Zealand in about 1000AD, the only "animals" were birds, and mostly flightless ones (as they had no predators). The largest bird, the Mao, stood 10 feet tall and could weigh 550 pounds. The Maori eventually hunted them to extinction for food. The only mammals, at that time, were bats. After the English arrival, mammals were either intentionally or accidentally introduced, causing problems. The possum is a huge pest. This nocturnal animal "controls the night" and eats everything.....mostly trees, but they have installed metal collars around telephone and power polls to prevent them from climbing the poles and eating the insulation from the wires. Same deal with the rabbits.....like the possums, they take over, as they have no natural enemies.

New Zealand is now very careful about what you bring into their country. When we arrived, we had to declare any food items (Marcia had some unopened Pringles containers that we declared but they did not ask to see). Kal declared that his packed hiking shoes may not be "pristine" and had to go through a special line, extract them from his suitcase, and have the soles tested for any possible micro-organism contamination that could change the eco-system of the New Zealand soil.



Leaving the Bay of Islands, our motor coach heads south, stopping at the harbor front of the small city of Whangarei, where we enjoy a 45 minute rest and shopping stop. It's another great weather day.....mostly sunny and temperature in the 70s. Then, we go further south and have a lunch stop. Back on the road to Auckland, we take the "scenic route" and enjoy viewing the beautiful beaches on the shores north of Auckland. This is the start of a 3-day weekend for Aucklanders, and the roads heading north are not designed to handle the traffic.....backups for many miles, and it's only 3PM on this Friday afternoon. We are headed against traffic, and arrive without too much delay at our hotel for tonight (again, the great Langham hotel that we stayed in last Sunday and Monday night).



Auckland – City of Sails

We'll be having an included dinner in the excellent hotel restaurant tonight, then heading out early tomorrow, extending our travels of New Zealand's South Island to the central region of Rotorua.



New Zealand Trip – Day 8 – January 30th



Bags packed and out at 7AM, down to breakfast, and on to the motor coach at 8AM as we leave the Langham Hotel in Auckland to travel south to the central region of the North Island. As this is a Saturday morning on a three-day weekend, traffic is extremely light.

Our first stop is at the summit of Mt. Eden, an ancient (inactive) volcano on the western side of Auckland. It's a beautiful, clear morning and we have an outstanding 360 degree view.....downtown Auckland, the Hauraki Gulf (Pacific ocean), Manukau Harbor (the western, Tasman Sea side) and all of the Auckland suburbs. Everything is so "green".

We drive for a couple of hours and stop to take a ride on a restored train that was used to help mine the old New Zealand goldfields, the "Goldfields Train". We are ushered into a dining car, served coffee, tea, small sandwiches and cookies as we hear about the history of the train.



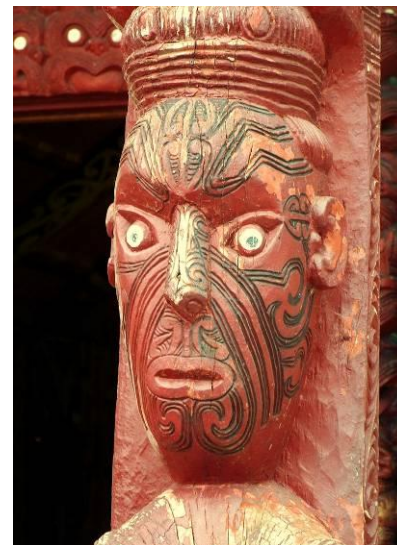
Next, a short twenty minute ride to a working dairy farm.....Longlands Homestead.....for a home cooked lamb roast lunch. We are first met by the farm manager who takes us to the milking stations and does a fine job of describing the dairy farming process, the milking process, the life of a dairy cow and the economics of dairy farming in New Zealand. We learn that this country is a major exporter of milk and milk by products; it's now their number one export industry. One advantage

they have is that the moderate climate of New Zealand allows the cows to feed exclusively on grass, with no need to supply expensive supplemental food. Then we have a great buffet lunch on the outside deck of a beautiful house (it's hard to call it a farmhouse) and spend time walking through the gardens.



Back on the motor coach, we arrive in Rotorua, just as a light rain starts. Rotorua is situated on a major volcanic “fault line” and is famous for thermal baths, geysers, hot springs, and the 1886 volcanic eruption that destroyed a village.

Whakarewarewa Thermal Village is our first stop (while Roger goes on with the motor coach and picks up the keys to our hotel rooms and has the bags delivered). This is an old Maori village built around thermal springs, and we learn (in a steady drizzle!) how they use the hot springs to cook their food and heat their houses. Some of the spring’s waters are boiling, and geysers are erupting in the distance. Very unique.



We checked into the Rotorua Noveltel, our hotel for the next two nights, and then the Elvings and Tinkas meet at 6:30PM and have dinner at one of the many patio restaurants in this resort town.

Now, this is a special summer holiday night in Rotorua, as it's time for the annual “Lakeshore” free concert, put on by top New Zealand talent.....right across from our hotel. The theme of this year's concert is “Hollywood Goes to Vegas”, and features a huge cast (band, orchestra, horn section, dancers, backup singers, and the featured acts) mostly doing standards and show tunes. We all watch part of the first set, and I go back and catch the second (and last set), as the rain has finally stopped. With two large TV screens to help view the action and an excellent sound system it's a great production. The second set opens with Sinatra's “New York, New York”, so I have to stick around! The crowd goes wild (especially the teenage girls) when Simon Walker, a Kiwi who won “Australian Idol” comes on and does three songs. The finale is the song “I Had The Time of My Life”, started by a male and female New Zealand star, then the whole cast joins them on stage, and, as the song refrains into an instrumental, next ten minutes of spectacular fireworks (bursting right on top of us), then back to the vocals.....a masterpiece. The concert ends with a patriotic New Zealand Maori song (that I do not recognize, but the happy crowd of perhaps 10,000 does). A wonderful night.

Tomorrow is our “Scenic Free Choice” day in Rotorua.

New Zealand Trip – Day 9 – Sunday January 31st

Today we stay in Rotorua in the central part of the North Island. The day starts overcast and rainy, but warm. It looks like this will be the weather we will have for most of today.....our first really rainy day. We're glad we got all of our "North Island water activities" in while the weather was nice. This is the day we choose a "Scenic Free Choice" activity, the cost of which was included in our tour package.

None of the Rotorua Scenic Free Choices really excites us. The choices are the Agrodome (a sheep show and dog herding show), Kiwi Encounter (all about the flightless bird), Buried Village (a visit to the village buried in the 1848 volcanic eruption), Rotorua Museum (more on the Maori culture), Polynesian Day Spa (hey, we're already beautiful), City and Lakes Tour (on an aquaduck amphibious vehicle), Te Puia (guided tour of more thermals and geysers plus Mori arts and crafts).....Marie and Marcia pick this one, and 4WD Safari Adventure (driving a 4WD vehicle on a close circuit).....Kal and Jim sign up for this.



At 9:30PM Marie and Marcia board the motor coach for the trip to Te Puia. There, they see more thermal springs, boiling water and boiling mud pools, geysers, and several Maori crafts, all in intermittent rain. They also got to see an actual live Kiwi bird. Since it is nocturnal they had switched its day and night so it could be viewed doing something other than sleeping. After actually seeing the flightless bird and finding out how its numbers have been decimated by imported animals, we certainly hope they can be saved from extinction.

At 10:30AM, Kal and I take a ride in our motor coach where we have about a 40 minute wait for the to pick us up. This works out well, as there's a fields around the Agrodome, and we watch some and some lumberjack competitions. We also get and watch a little bit of the "sheep show". It and this will undoubtedly be what it will be like



coach to the Agrodome, van from the 4WD excursion farm show going on in the sheep shearing competitions to walk into the Agrodome continues to rain on and off, for the rest of the day.

We're picked up at 11:30AM and transported to the main base of the 4WD folks. They give us a briefing and we pair up (Kal and I together) and we have a great experience, for the next hour, on their enclosed circuit, driving small Suzuki four wheel drive vehicles. The circuit is amazing.....I'm sure American lawyers would not let anything like this go on in the USA.....we drive through deep water, up steep embankments, and actually go down a 75 degree (yes, almost straight down) track. Great fun and we'd do it again if given a chance.



The afternoon is spent with shopping and dodging the rain. At 6:30 we meet for a nice dinner. Tomorrow, we drive to Napier on the southeast coast of the North Island.



New Zealand Trip – Day 10 – Monday February 1st

Up early this morning (and it's still raining!), bags packed and outside our door at 8AM, and down to breakfast. We have our "group photo" in the lobby of the hotel. It was scheduled for two days ago when we first arrived in Rotorua, but the on-and-off rain prevented an outside shot. Onto the motor coach at 9AM and we head south towards our first stop in the Lake Taupo area.

Our Tour Director, Valerie, announces that last night's rain has washed out the only highway between Lake Taupo and Napier, our stop for tonight on the southeast coast of the North Island. A quick check of our maps confirms our fears.....the only other route requires a drive almost to Wellington and then back north to Napier. Our two hour trip from Lake Taupo to Napier could turn into a six hour plus trip.



After about an hour drive, in improving weather, and through rolling forest and farmland (with frequent plumes of steam rising from the thermal activity prevalent in this region) we arrive at our first stop, the Wairakei Electric Generation Plant. This plant, along with another nearby, generates 8% of New Zealand electricity, all from steam generated from the underground volcanic activity, driving turbines to generate the electricity. A most interesting complex of exposed pipes and generators..... our motor coach drives around and we can get out and view everything from platforms. I'm sure, if this was in the USA, we'd not be allowed within a mile of the plant.

Next, we drive to world famous Huka Falls. Here, the full force of the Waikato river hurtles from a narrow gorge over a 36 foot high ledge. Due to the amount of air bubbles generated and the nature of the water, the falls have a unique ice-blue color. We enjoy our stop here, and next travel onto Lake Tekapo, the largest lake in New Zealand. We have about an hour, before reboarding the motor coach at noon, for shopping and

lunch. It's been recommended that we catch an early lunch, as the possible detour route to Napier would preclude any lunch stop.





Back on the motor coach at noon, we are happy to hear that they have just reopened the road from Lake Tekapo to Napier, so we should make it to Napier in two hours, and not the six hours required by the detour. We drive through some beautiful country for the next two hours.....canyons, hills covered with either trees or farms (with cows, sheep, or deer), very little population

and almost no side roads. We pass through the area where the small landslides caused the road to be closed. Halfway to Napier, the rain returns and it's raining quite hard when we enter Napier. We know that Napier was destroyed by an earthquake in 1931. The central business district was rebuilt in the "Art Deco" style. We check into our hotel, which is right on the Pacific Ocean. We all have rooms with great views, and now spend a couple of hours shopping and viewing the art deco buildings (in the off and on rain).

At 5:45 we depart for our wine-tasting and dinner at the Church Road Winery and Restaurant. We select either herb scented chicken breast or marinated beef for our entrée and either lemon curd meringue or chocolate brownie for desert. We also get to choose between the four wines we sampled for our dinner wine. After dinner we played with Merlot the black cat before we boarded our bus back to the hotel.

