

## New Zealand - South Island

### New Zealand Trip – Day 12 – Wednesday February 3<sup>rd</sup>



We are up early this morning in Wellington. Bags packed and out at 6AM, then on board the motor coach at 7AM. Roger takes us on a brief sightseeing tour of downtown Wellington and the key government buildings, then down to the docks. We bid goodbye to Roger, as we will be getting a new driver and motor coach when we reach the South Island. We really enjoyed our ten days on the North Island. Only two rainy days (well timed), great accommodations and attractions. Even though this is “high season” in New Zealand, we really have not encountered anything that could be considered a “crowd” (unlike our recent travels in Italy).

We board a huge ferry for the three hour cruise (covering 50 nautical miles) from New Zealand’s North Island to the South Island. Our ferry is the “Kaitaki Challenger” and is about 200 yards long with ten decks. It has a passenger capacity of 1600 and a car capacity of 600. Our tour group is seated in a special first class lounge, where we have comfortable couches and chairs, internet access, and a breakfast and lunch buffet. At 8:20AM we depart from the Wellington harbor. Forty-five minutes later we enter the Cook Strait, separating the North and South Islands. This can be one of the roughest stretches of water in the world, but it’s very calm today. An hour later we enter Tory Sound and then Queen Charlotte Sound. We travel through these two sounds for an hour and a half, before docking at Picton on the South Island.....this offered the most amazing scenery.....high mountains on both sides of a narrow channel.

At Picton we quickly board our new motor coach (identical to the one we had on the North Island) and begin our ten days on the South Island. Now, the South Island is nearer to the South Pole (than the North Island) so the weather may be a few degrees cooler. Our new driver, Dexter, reminds us that New Zealand is a country of 4.4 million people, but less than 1 million live on the South Island, with nearly 400,000 of them living in the largest city, Christchurch.....the areas we will now be visiting are not heavily populated. There is much less Maori influence in the South Island. The northern part of



the island was settled by the English (Christchurch is said to be the most “English” city outside of Great Britain), while the Scots settled the southern part of the island (hence Dunedin is called the “Edinburgh of the South”).



We drive down the northeast coast, along the Pacific Ocean, with large mountains inland, on our left. We first stop near Kaikoura, where we view a seal colony, then continue into the small town for a rest and shopping break. We drive on through several high mountain passes before entering the “plains of Canterbury” for our final run to Christchurch. We do see a lot of cows, but the sheep clearly have the upper hand on the South Island. The weather today has been fine. A little cloudy at first, then mostly sunny with the temperatures in the low 70s.

We arrive at our hotel in Christchurch, the Millennium, at 5:20PM. It’s exactly in the middle of the city, in Cathedral Square (and right next to the Christchurch Cathedral). It’s another five star hotel, with huge, fine rooms. We all go out for a little shopping and enjoy walking through the streets. Then, down to our included dinner, a nice buffet, in the hotel main restaurant at 7PM.



## New Zealand Trip – Day 13 – Thursday February 4<sup>th</sup>

Bags packed and out at 6:30AM, down to breakfast, then on to the motor coach at 7:30AM and we depart Christchurch (on the east coast of the South Island) for the west coast.

After a short ten minute ride, we board a train, the “Trans Alpine” for a 2-1/2 hour journey through the Plain of Canterbury and up into the Southern Alps.....spectacular scenery. The train has an outside car for viewing but unfortunately some individuals staked out spots along the side and did not move for the entire time. So getting pictures from there was impossible. Pictures from inside the car had reflections due to the window. So we decided to just sit back and enjoy the views. At Arthur’s Pass, the motor coach picks us up again for the journey down to the west coast (the train would take us there, but spends most of the rest of the “scenic” part of the journey in tunnels). We travel on to Hokitika for a nice lunch and last chance to set foot into the Tasman Sea. Beautiful beach with high waves – almost no one there. So it was great.



Then, it’s on to Franz Joseph and the famous New Zealand glaciers. They are famous, as they descend from the mountains all the way to the tropical rain forests near sea level. Unlike other glaciers, they are still growing. We’ve all signed up for an optional....a helicopter ride to the glaciers. This is amazing.....a 30 minute trip in five or six seat helicopters from sea level up the face of the mountain, over the Southern Alps (at 10,000 feet), past Mt. Cook. We actually land on the Franz Joseph Glacier (at 7000 feet) where we spend five minutes on the glacier before returning to the helicopter base. (Marcia took lots of videos which she will upload when we return home.)





This has been another fine weather day.....mixed clouds and sun, with temperatures above normal.....near 80 degrees.

Next, it's on to our hotel, the brand new (it's only been open two months) Te Waonui Forest Retreat.....said to be the best hotel in New Zealand. It is spectacular, with beautiful rooms set in a rain forest. The "rack rate", for the room is \$760 NZ\$ (about 600 US\$). In addition individuals must purchase dinner and breakfast here (at additional cost). We walk into town to enjoy cocktails (at a reasonable rate) then return to our hotel for a great (included) four course meal.

Enjoying the weather and the view



View from our balcony

## New Zealand Trip - Day 14 – Friday February 5th

Bags out at 7AM, down to breakfast, and on the motor coach at 8AM. Today we leave Franz Josef (on the west coast of the South Island) after a one night stay and travel to the “adventure capital of New Zealand”, Queenstown, for a three night stay. Queenstown will be the longest stopover of our trip. Today should offer the very, very best scenery of our coach trip, although none has been poor (I brought a lot of reading material for the motor coach, and have yet to read a thing except travel related stuff)!

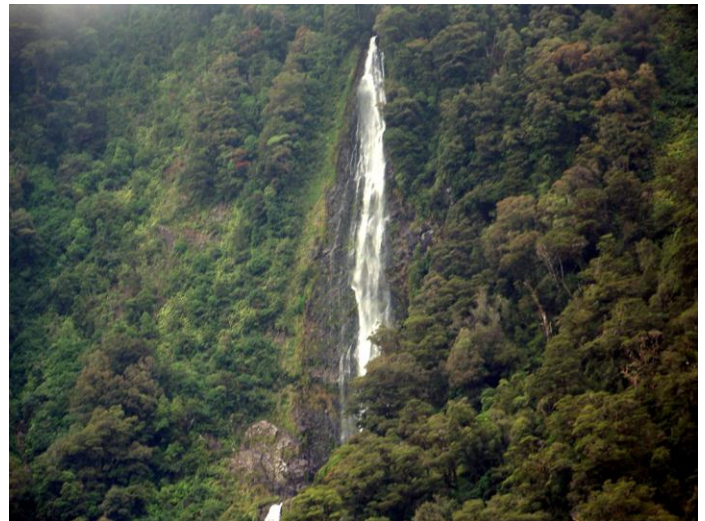


We first travel through the semi-tropical rain forest and along the Tasman Sea for several hours, rarely seeing any other vehicles. We have a brief “tea stop” at a salmon farm/restaurant, then make a stop on the Haast river mid-morning.

We next take an exciting trip on a jet boat up the Haast river. Jet boats were invented in New Zealand, and use a water propulsion system like a jet ski. They can maneuver in water only 4 to 6 inches deep. We are in boats that hold about 25 people, powered by twin 350 horsepower engines, hitting

speeds of 50 mph. We have a great trip, covering 20 miles up the river, with very humorous commentary from our local boat driver, Lindsey. We stop for a “quartz hunt” and he does several 360 degree fast turns (all within the length of the boat). This is great!

Back on the motor coach, we leave the west coast and cut through the “Southern Alps”, stopping for lunch and then pressing on for Queenstown. I won’t attempt to describe the views.....oceans, lakes, glaciers, mountains, waterfalls, forests.....hopefully some of Marcia’s photos will.....this has to be the most scenic one day drives in the world.



We arrive in Queenstown at 5PM and check into our hotel, the St. Moritz, where we will be for the next three nights. The hotel is great and the rooms (suites) amazing. Large bathroom with separate bath and shower, large bedroom with TV, huge living room with flat screen TV, small kitchen (with a washer and dryer) and a balcony overlooking the lake that Queenstown sits on. This is the best!



Marcia, Jim, Marie and Kal meet at 6:30PM and Kal finds a nice Italian restaurant, where we can sit outside and have pizza for dinner. Today has been a remarkable weather day. The morning clouds burned off, and the temperature hit a near record in the South Island (88 degrees in Queenstown) under sunny skies. Is this paradise?

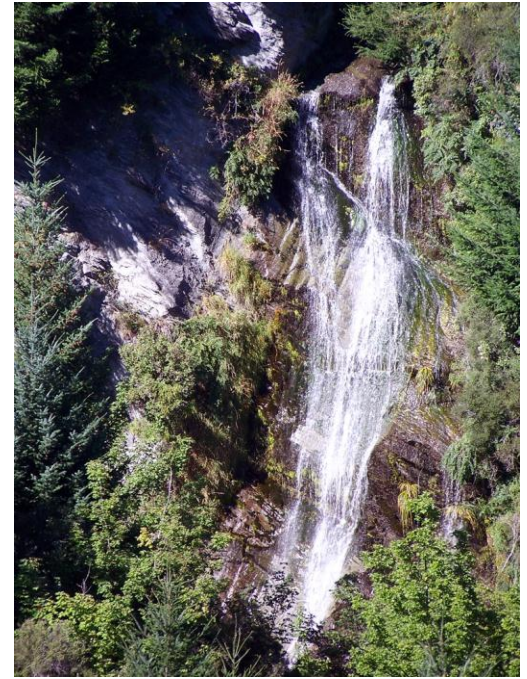


### **New Zealand Trip – Day 15 – Saturday February 6<sup>th</sup>**

We wake up on the first of our three mornings at the St. Moritz hotel in Queenstown to a nice sunrise across Lake Wakatipu. Not a cloud in the sky, so it does appear that we will have another great day of weather. Today is “Waitangi Day” in New Zealand. It’s their national holiday celebrating the 1840 treaty between the Maori and Great Britain, which brought the Maori under British sovereignty. We’ve read that there will possibly be demonstrations and unruly behavior on the North Island (especially in the Bay of Islands area that we visited on our first week) by Maoris feeling that their ancestors got a poor deal. Should be no problem here on the South Island, where the Maori presence is minimal.



Today is our Scenic Free Choice activity in Queenstown, and the four of us (along with about twenty others in our tour group) have chosen the “Skippers Canyon” excursion. We meet at 8AM in the lobby and board special eight seat 4WD Toyota vans (with skylights) and spend the next four and a half hours exploring Skipper’s Canyon, which is the area where gold was discovered in the 1860’s, and led to a rapid increase in population in the South Island. Most of our trip is spent driving on a one-lane road (in use both ways!) that was hand-hewed from rock, on the face of steep cliffs, during the 1860s and 1870s. We cross a narrow suspension bridge built in 1900, and have many photo stops as we pass abandoned mining sites before stopping at the end of the road, at a restored small settlement, for refreshments. Amazing views on a perfect day (crystal clear skies, no wind, and temperatures in the upper 70s). Our guide, Graham, is outstanding, keeping us entertained while describing the features of the area.



Back into Queenstown at 12:30PM, the four of us have lunch in an outdoor café by the harbor, watching the locals enjoy a holiday, before setting off on hikes and shopping excursions. The local folks that I chat with tell me that today's and yesterday's weather is the best they can remember for years.

Tonight is our "Scenic Free Choice Dine-Around" and most all of the group has chosen the boat trip across the lake to a buffet dinner at a sheep farm. We board the TSS Earnslaw, a coal fired steam ship that has been in continuous operation since 1912, for a forty-five minute trip across Lake Wakatipu to the Mt. Carver High Country Sheep Station. There, we enjoy a good buffet dinner, then a demonstration of a sheep dog herding the flock and a sheep shearing show before returning via to boat to Queenstown at 10PM.



#### **New Zealand Trip – Day 16 – Sunday February 7<sup>th</sup>**

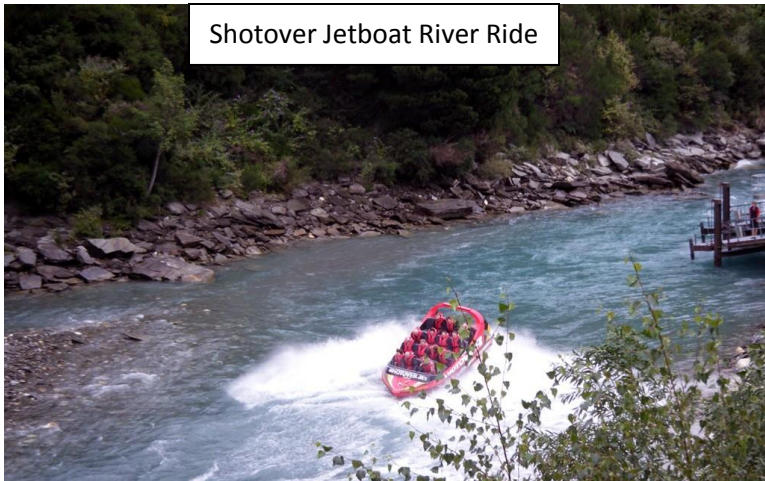
We wake up from our second of three nights in Queenstown and get ready for an optional activity that we have signed up for, "The Shotover River Jet Boat". This was actually a "Scenic Free Choice Option" that we could have done for "free", yesterday, but we instead took the more expensive Skipper's Canyon excursion, so we will be paying for this one.



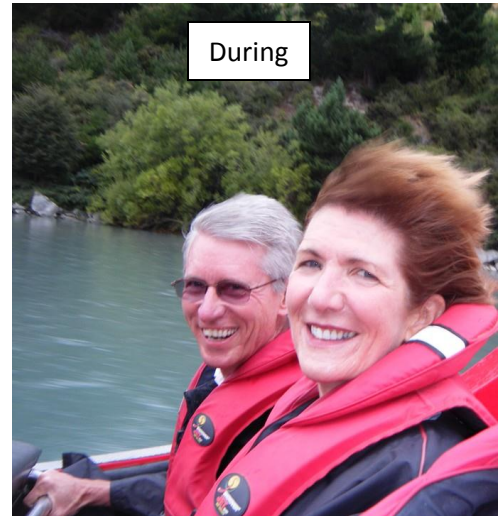
Before

At 8:30 we meet and take a short mini-bus ride to the Shotover river, we arrive at the attraction's base camp, are given rain parkas (for the river spray) and life jackets and board the open fourteen passenger jet boat. We are taken on a thrilling ride up and down the shallow Shotover river as our boat pilot expertly skirts the rock face of the canyon sides and does numerous 360 degree spins.....great fun.

Back to the hotel at 11AM. Marie and Kal head off for a hike while Marcia and Jim go to do some shopping and a walk.



Shotover Jetboat River Ride



During



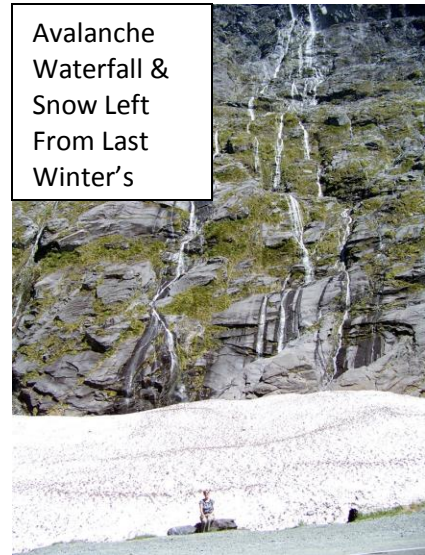
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## New Zealand Trip – Day 17 – Monday February 8<sup>th</sup>

We are up for our last of three mornings in Queenstown. Today the four of us will be leaving our tour group, for a little over a day, to go on an overnight cruise in Milford Sound.

The rest of our Scenic Tour group leave the hotel at 7:30AM (they will be going directly to Milford Sound for an afternoon cruise) while we are picked up about 9AM by the tour company that runs our Milford Sound excursion. They drive us south and then west from Queenstown, through farms raising sheep, cattle and deer, to the town of Te Anau, the gateway to Fiordland National Park. This huge park, on the southwest coast of the South Island, comprises about 8% of the total land area of New Zealand, and is the least populated part of the country.



After lunch in Te Anau, we leave on a three hour drive to Milford Sound, all through incredible mountainous scenery. Until this road was completed in 1954, Milford Sound was only accessible from the sea or by a multi-day hike on the Milford Track.....still considered one of the great hikes in the world. The road was started as a “WPA” project during the Depression but work was suspended during WWII as most of the workforce went off to war. The last step was completion of the Homer Tunnel, a ¼ mile one lane cut through a mountain. On our motor coach trip to Milford Sound we stop eight times for photo opportunities or for short walks through special areas.

We board our ship, the Milford Mariner at 4:30PM. It's 40 yards long, with four decks and 30 staterooms. Milford Sound is actually a fiord formed by glaciers in ancient times. Towering on both sides of the fiord are mountains, a few topped with glaciers, (including Fiordland's highest, Mt. Tutoko at 9,000+ feet), and many waterfalls. On our way out into the fiord we run into a pod of dolphins and enjoy watching them swim along and under our ship. At 5:30PM we anchor near the fiord's outlet into the Tasman Sea for recreation time. Rather than kayak, we choose to go on a 45 minute ride, with a guide, in one of the ship's tenders, checking out the shore and wildlife. The west coast of the South Island is one of the wettest place on earth, experiencing rain 200 days a year and having total rainfall of over 300 inches per year. Fortunately, today is another clear and warm day for us! Later, our ship cruises out into the Tasman Sea as we enjoy a nice buffet dinner. We dine with a well traveled couple from the Philippines. As we are below the 45<sup>th</sup> parallel, rather close to the South Pole, the sun does not set until well past 9:30PM.



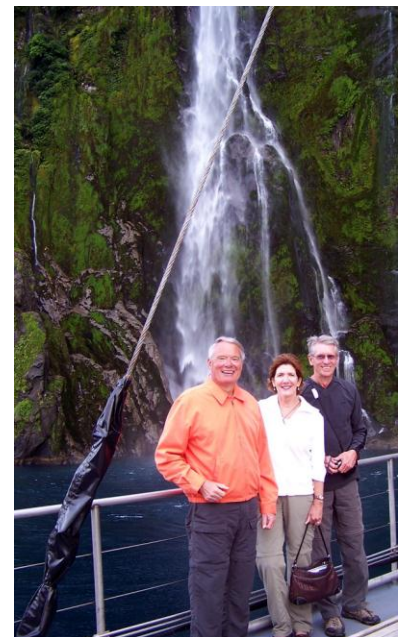


After dinner, a crew member presents an informative slide show on the area in the ship's lounge. Then, it's time to gaze at the stars and try to find the Southern Cross. Now, the NFL Super Bowl started at noon time today (Monday) New Zealand time, and it's now near midnight and we can't find out who won. The only communication route is by radio back to Milford Sound. I went up to the wheel house and asked the Captain if he knew, and he let me know he didn't care and didn't know anyone he could call in Milford Sound who would know!



Bottlenose Dolphins

### New Zealand Trip – Day 18 – Tuesday February 9<sup>th</sup>



We awake this morning in our small staterooms on the ship Milford Mariner, which is anchored in Milford Sound on the southwest coast of New Zealand's South Island. Yes, our staterooms are small....two small beds, one small night table, and a small, separate bathroom with toilet, sink and shower. Our rooms open onto an exterior gangway, and both have windows on each side of the door. The rooms are comfortable, and the plumbing all works well.



Milford Sound is extremely calm this morning, and it's great to sit, in the dead quiet, and watch the sunrise. We get underway at 7AM, sailing back out towards the Tasman Sea, as breakfast is served. At 8AM, our ship starts back up the fiord, first coming along shore next to a small seal colony where we watch the seals swim and frolic, then sailing in to the spray of a waterfall falling 3000 feet straight down a cliff. We arrive at the dock at the town of Milford Sound at 9:15AM. We leave the boat and board the excursion coach for a two and a half hour drive out of the Fiordland National Park back to Te Anau. We agree that our Milford Sound overnight trip has been one of the highlights of our visit in New Zealand.

At Te Anau, we rejoin our Scenic Tours group. Everyone wants to hear about our overnight trip, while we get filled in on the activities we missed.....their afternoon trip on Milford Sound, last night's group dinner and this morning's trip to the Glowworm Caves. After lunch, our motor coach heads across the southern end of the South Island of New Zealand, heading from the western side to the far eastern side. We travel through some of the richest farmland in New Zealand, but the land is fairly flat; this is probably the first "semi-boring" scenery we've encountered.



About mid-afternoon, Dexter, our coach driver, is telling us that we'll soon be passing a place that restores Tiger Moth airplanes. These are rather historic one and two seat bi-planes that were made in England in the 1920s and 1930s. As we pass the "Moth Field" not only do we see a couple of Tiger Moth planes, but a long row of historic automobiles lined up next to the grass landing strip. Dexter takes a quick "poll", and we vote to investigate! He turns our coach around, returns the field and parks right behind the historic cars, which we learn are forty or so classic Bentleys, on a driving tour of New Zealand. Our Tour Director, Valerie, quickly determines this is the place to stop for our afternoon tea break, and heads for a nearby small restaurant to make sure they have sufficient supplies. So, for the next half hour we enjoy examining the classic British cars (they ranged in age from 1924 to 2008), chatting with their owners, and watching a pilot take the Bentley drivers up for airplane rides in a two seat Tiger Moth. We really enjoy this, and as the majority of the folks in our tour group are from England, they all really enjoy seeing the classic English cars and planes.

We continue our drive, arriving in the city of Dunedin about 5:30PM. The southern part of New Zealand's South Island was originally settled by Scots, and Dunedin is called "the Edinburgh of New Zealand". Our hotel is an older one, right in the center of town. The rooms are large and comfortable. Good internet service, so we can send out yesterday's e-mail, which was delayed due to no internet service on the ship or in the Milford Sound area. Our included dinner tonight is in the hotel restaurant, where we order off the menu and enjoy excellent food. Today's weather has been OK, mostly cloudy but with some sun and temperatures in the upper 60s.



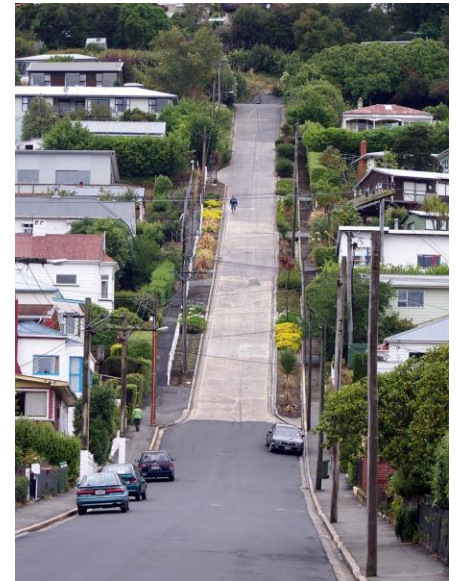
**New Zealand Trip – Day 19 – Wednesday February 10<sup>th</sup>**



We wake up after a one night stay in Dunedin, on the southeast coast of the South island of New Zealand. After breakfast, we board our motor coach for a tour of this city. We drive past the old

“Scottish” looking municipal buildings in the center of town and a couple of the universities that this city is noted for. Then, up to a mountain overlooking Dunedin for some great views. Then we stop at the “steepest street in the world” as certified by the Guinness Book of Records.....it rises 2.61 inches for every 1 inch horizontal, at its steepest part.

Last, we stop at the nice railroad station, built in 1906.



Next we drive up the coast of the South Pacific Ocean for about an hour, stopping to view the Moeraki Boulders, which are large, smooth rock spheres, up to five feet in diameter, on the beach. They are over four million years old, and are natural limestone formations, exposed over time. After lunch in the old town of Oamaru (the four of us all have “Fish and Chips” with is a New Zealand favorite) we turn inland and travel to the central part of the island, passing through a lake region formed by three



hydroelectric dams placed across the Waitaki River.

Then we drive on to our lodgings for the night, Peppers Bluewater Resort, on the shore of Lake Tekapo. Pepper’s is a new facility, and it’s really more of a “time share” type for property, so the rooms are quite nice.....more like a small apartments/condominiums. Now, the weather has been overcast all day, with cool temperatures in the upper 50s. We were hoping to get a great view of the stars in the southern sky tonight (we are right next to the New Zealand National Observatory, and the whole area is a low light area), as this is one of the driest areas of the country, but the skies may not cooperate.



At 7PM we meet for an included dinner in the hotel restaurant, and it’s excellent. The four of us sit with two Australian couples and have great conversations (actually, one couple is from Queensland Australia, and he’s originally from England and she is from the Philippines, and the second couple is from Sydney Australia, but they both immigrated from South Africa to Australia in 1996).

## New Zealand Trip – Day 20 – Thursday February 11<sup>th</sup>

We awake today in Lake Tekapo in the central lake region of the South Island of New Zealand. This will be our last full day in New Zealand. Tomorrow night we depart for home. Down to breakfast. Now, our driver Dexter has had us Americans try the popular New Zealand breakfast spread “Marmite” and we all agree it’s not like anything we have in the USA! Kal is collecting all of the samples that he can find, so as to share with his friends when he gets back home.



During our travels we have learned that New Zealand has an interesting approach to a major component of health care. They have a government run accident insurance plan (ACC) that covers health care and compensation for any accidents that happen to New Zealanders or visitors like us (hurt bungee jumping?). It is funded by a payroll tax on all workers (higher rates for dangerous jobs). If you are injured, your ambulance and hospital costs and rehabilitation costs are covered. If you lose a limb, a set amount is paid to you (higher amount if you are younger, as it will affect your wage earning

abilities for a longer time). Except in rare cases, no litigation is allowed in accident cases, so the avoidance of lawyers is what controls the costs. This plan has been working for quite a few years, and the New Zealanders seem quite proud of it.

We board our motor coach at 8:30AM for a short ride to a small historic stone church on the shore of Lake Tekapo.....The Church of the Good Shepherd. Kal had thought that we’d get all the way through this vacation without visiting any of the numerous churches and cathedrals that we have visited on all of our other journeys, and clearly shows his feelings at not being shut out on this trip! After viewing a memorial to the sheep dog (another highlight.....I think this tour is winding down!), we drive on to Christchurch. After lunch, we have a driving tour, including a stop at a summit overlooking the city for some nice views, despite the weather, which is overcast and cool, with temperature in the mid-60s. We check into



the nice Millennium Hotel on Cathedral Square (the same hotel we stayed in on our first night on the South Island) at 3PM, then we all head out for some shopping.

At 6:30PM our whole group gathers for our included “Highlight Dinner”.....our last time together. We first all get on a (reserved) antique Christchurch Trolley for a half-hour trip (with drinks) to our restaurant a Belgian Brewery where we have a very fine meal (but no dessert ☹). After dinner we had a nice stroll over the Avon River back to our hotel. Tomorrow our final Scenic Tour Free Choices – the Botanical Garden, Punting Along The Avon, and a Trip to the Antarctic.



## New Zealand Trip – Day 21 (Part 1) – Friday February 12<sup>th</sup>



We wake up this morning in Christchurch. This is our last day in New Zealand, as we depart for the USA this afternoon.



The four of us agree that this has been a great trip; one of our best, ever, if not the best. However, we are looking forward to getting home, but dreading the long travel that awaits us.

This morning we do our “Scenic Free Choice” options in Christchurch. Marcia goes “Punting on the Avon”, which consists on a boat ride on the Avon River, riding in a small flat-bottom boat, being pushed along by a standing boatman using a pole (kind of like a Venice gondola). Afterwards she walks through the Botanical Gardens. Marie and Kal take the guided excursion through the Botanical Gardens. I take the excursion to the Antarctic Center out near the airport, where I watch



the penguins being fed,

experience an Antarctic storm in a cold room, and ride in a tracked Antarctic vehicle. Sitting on the tarmac was a huge LS310 US Air Force plane, flown by the New York National Guard out of Schenectady Airport, named “The Pride of Scotia”.

We regroup for lunch and have a good one at an outdoor café. The weather is sunny and warm, with temperatures in the mid-70’s.



## New Zealand Trip – Day 21 (Part 2) – Friday February 12<sup>th</sup>

We all arrive at the Christchurch New Zealand airport in plenty of time for our 4:30PM flight to Auckland. We check our bags through to Los Angeles and enjoy an easy hour-and-a-half flight to Auckland on an Air New Zealand 737. Great views from the airplane of a lot of the country we have been traveling through for the past three weeks.

At Auckland we walk about 12 minutes to the international terminal, where we clear customs control and the “standard” security we’re all used to.....walking through the security devices and having our bags x-rayed. Then we go up to our gate where we find a large backup, as we have to go through an enhanced level of security, undoubtedly because we are getting on a flight to the USA. Everyone gets a full body pat-down, including inspection of everything we’re carrying on our body (like wallets). Then, we go to one of twenty inspection stations, where a security agent takes 5 minutes and searches everything in our carry-ons.

We board our Air New Zealand 747, which takes off at 7:35PM on Friday. We have a 13 hour flight, but we pass over the International Dateline, so it’s earlier in the same day, Friday, (10:30AM) when we reach LAX. The flight is fine. The seats are fairly comfortable, the food very good, and all four of us were able to catch some sleep and we all feel pretty good when we get to Los Angeles.

We clear immigration, get our checked luggage and clear customs, and walk from the International Terminal towards the Domestic terminals. Here, the Elvings and Tinkas say their goodbyes and part company, as Marcia and Jim fly out of Terminal 1 on Southwest, while Marie and Kal fly from Terminal 4 on American.

We (Marcia and Jim) are glad we have plenty of time to make our connection, as lines (for check in and security) are very long on a Friday. Our Southwest Airlines flight leaves on time (2PM PST) for the four hour flight to Chicago (arrives 8PM CST), then a two hour Southwest flight to Albany, arriving on time at 11:30PM EST.

We arrive home at 12:30AM, and find that we have a voice-mail from Marie.....not good news! Marie and Kal never made it out of Los Angeles, as American Airlines had canceled their first flight (they were going to Dallas, then onto Dayton). Hey.....we had heard that it snowed in Dallas, but that was yesterday! Anyway, they are now at a hotel near the LAX airport, booked on an early American Airlines flight to Chicago that will hopefully allow them to connect to a flight that will see them get back to Dayton mid-afternoon on Saturday. They finally arrive home around 5:00 P.M. on Saturday, February 13<sup>th</sup>.

### Christchurch Botanical Gardens

