

***New Zealand
and
Australia
January-February, 2023***



This would be our sixth visit to New Zealand and our third to Australia. The trip came about primarily as a result of conversations between us and our daughter—the travel agent. She and several other couples had found a great deal for a 12-day cruise around New Zealand which crossed the ocean to end in Sydney. This was found and booked late in 2021 and appeared as the effects of the Covid pandemic were beginning to ease.

In the spring of 2022, Elizabeth mentioned it to us, together with the fact that several of the other couples were considering dropping out. Molly and I looked at the itinerary (which seemed appealing) and the group rate (still available) and decided to join them. As it turned out, all her friends eventually cancelled so we were left to sail with Elizabeth and Chip—even better!

Since we were traveling the long distance to join the cruise, Molly and I decided to arrive in New Zealand early and spend some time driving around that beautiful country. Following the cruise, we would stay in Australia for a few extra days also.

So, this trip swelled to a five-week vacation, with two weeks of it being in the company of our daughter and son in-law.

We flew via Atlanta, Los Angeles and Sydney to Queenstown, New Zealand, where we picked up our rental car that would take us (slowly) to Auckland and the start of the cruise. After 12 days of sailing around New Zealand and across the Tasman Sea to Sydney, we would complete the trip with time in this city and Canberra before flying home.

New Zealand and Australia, January-February 2023

Tuesday January 10/Wednesday January 11/ Thursday January 12

We left home a little before noon and drove our rental car to the airport. At check-in for our first flight to Atlanta, we tried (unsuccessfully) to get our bags checked all the way to Queenstown. The problem was that we were on a separate ticket and another airline (Virgin Australia) for the final leg from Sydney, and Delta no longer has an arrangement with them that allows through checking. We were aware of this potential and the fact that we might have to “enter” Australia (with only 75 minutes layover) so we had an additional ticket on Qantas for a somewhat later flight. It now looked as though we might have to play that card – but first we needed to get to Atlanta, LAX and Sydney.

The first flight was uneventful, and we arrived in Atlanta two hours before our onward flight to Los Angeles, so we spent this time in the Delta lounge. The flight to LAX left on time and was also uneventful (although quite bumpy for the final 1 ½ hours) and allowed us to enjoy dinner and some sleep. We had less than an hour before the scheduled boarding time for our Sydney flight, so we walked slowly to the new gate and skipped the lounge.

The first sign that there might be a problem came when the gate agent announced that they were oversold and looking for **30** volunteers to fly on **the following Sunday!** However, boarding started just a few minutes late so we thought we might leave on time. This was further supported by the captain’s announcement that, although the boarding process was slow, the favorable winds would see us in Sydney on time – or maybe a little early!

That was the end of the good news. Later announcements (30 minutes after scheduled departure time) said all were on board, but we were waiting for a few bags. A second announcement (one hour delay) said that four passengers had had to be taken off so they were now hunting for their bags! Finally, a full 90 minutes behind schedule, we pushed back with now, it seemed, no chance of making up that time. Indeed Flight Tracker showed us arriving in Sydney at least one hour late, essentially eliminating all our layover time.

At that time I cancelled the Virgin Australia flight from Sydney to Queenstown (with an unclear position on any refund) and we settled in hoping to make the Qantas backup flight from Sydney. The dinner was quite good (although the recently introduced Old Fashioned was not available) and we then tried for sleep – with still over 11 hours of flying time left.

Molly seemed to sleep quite well for over five hours; I slept fitfully for a similar time, but six hours out from Sydney it appeared to be over for both of us. By now it was 11am Wednesday in Cincinnati (who knows what the local time was?)

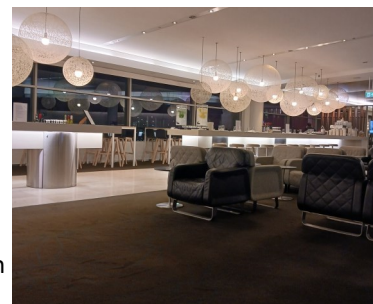
We finally reached Sydney shortly after 9:30 local time (now the 12th) and were rather quickly through Immigration and Baggage Claim. We then wandered around, asking a few people, before arriving at the Qantas check-in desk only to be told that we were too late (by minutes, it would appear). To cut a long story short, we booked an early flight Friday (again Qantas) and checked in at the Rydges Hotel adjacent to the airport property.

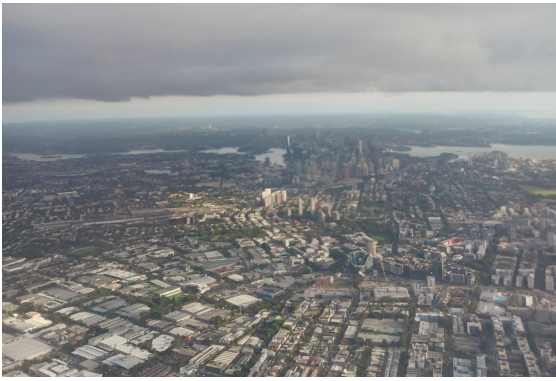
We had a light snack, made reservations at the restaurant for dinner and then tried to cancel or modify hotel and car reservations for Queenstown. This was far more difficult and frustrating than it should have been and is just another example of how difficult it is to speak with a representative of a large company. It seems, as Molly said, that the telephone system is designed to frustrate the customer to the point where he gives up – it certainly worked on me!

So, for the second time in three months, our vacation got off to a shaky start and was essentially delayed by a day. However, if this ultimately works out as well as the Italy trip did, we are in for a much better tomorrow and a great holiday. We ate in the hotel tonight and had a very pleasant dinner in a relaxed (if not sumptuous) surroundings.

Friday January 13

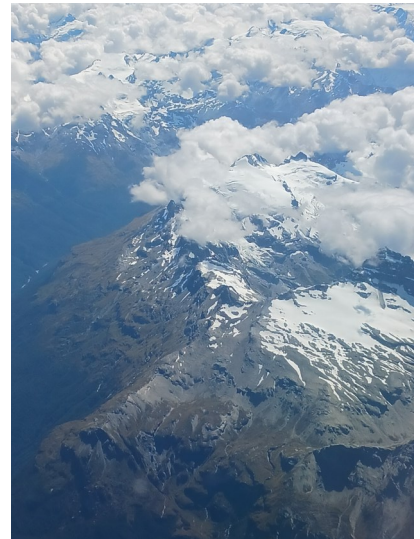
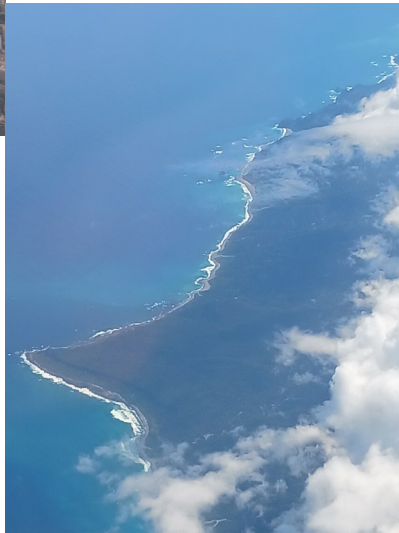
We were up at 4am (!!!) to pack, check out and walk across the road to the airport for our 7am flight. Check-in and Security were very straightforward at this time of day, and we were soon enjoying a drink in the very nice Qantas lounge. We chose to wait on breakfast until we were in the air which turned out to be a good decision. The 3-hour flight was smooth all the way but there was cloud cover over the Tasman Sea and we didn’t see much





Leaving Sydney on our way to Queenstown, New Zealand

until we were flying over Milford Sound. Here the clouds broke up somewhat and we had some amazing views of the Southern Alps (still very much snow-covered) and the mountains and valleys on the breathtaking approach to Queenstown.



Our bags arrived safely, and Immigration was straightforward and we were soon in our rental car and making the short drive to our hotel in the middle of town – with some spectacular views of the lake and mountains.



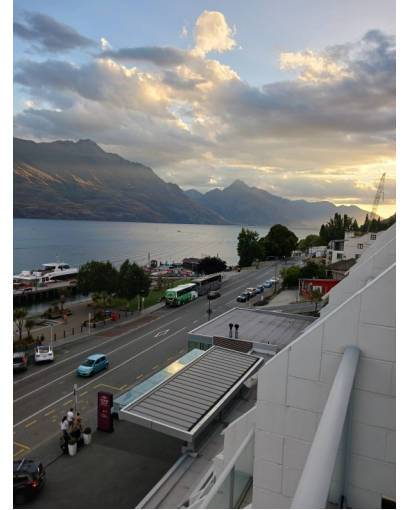
Once settled in the hotel, I received an email from Hertz with details of the reservation - which were wrong! Once again, a phone call did not help so we decided to go back to the airport and try to sort it out. We did – after several conversations – and then continued west to the old gold mining

town of Arrowtown. We had visited here a number of times and spent time understanding the history (particularly of the Chinese immigrants



who came to work in the gold mines) so today we simply walked the few short streets, had a late lunch, and then returned to Queenstown on a very scenic route a little north of the main road we had used on the way out.

Back at the hotel, I went for a short walk and then we both relaxed until dinner time. We had a late (8:45) reservation at Finz (a seafood restaurant) just a few minutes' walk from the hotel. We were seated in a covered courtyard outside the main dining area and had a very good meal. We both felt that food and drink were more expensive here than at home and certainly MUCH more than in our recent visit to South Africa, but an excellent meal, nevertheless. In addition, we had a nice conversation with our waiter (Japanese but had spent five years in Banff, Canada), an Indian family with a beautiful young daughter, and – back at the hotel – a Chinese trio who we assumed were now residents of New Zealand. Three interesting conversations and another endorsement for world travel. Everyone has a story!!! And we viewed a beautiful sunset.



Saturday January 14

We both slept well and were awake about 8am. We walked to the waterfront for breakfast at a very nice café. It was probably twice as much as a similar meal at home which already seems to be the norm for Queenstown. We expect/hope prices will moderate some once we leave this major tourist destination.

After breakfast, we got the car and started out on our drive to Wanaka, a little over an hour north of Queenstown. The traffic leaving town was very slow but we picked up speed a little once we were past the airport. The road we took was the Crown Range Route, which climbs very steeply to a little over 3000 feet, from where there are tremendous views over the valley and lake and to the mountains beyond.

Today it was a little hazy, but we still had some great views before descending the north side of the ridge in the small hamlet of Cardrona. Actually, it was a small hamlet (a hotel, store and little else) when we first visited over twenty years ago but it has grown considerably and now has significant housing and an alpine ski resort. The hotel is New Zealand's oldest, founded in 1863, and still has accommodation as well as being a favorite venue for weddings and other events.



Also, in Cardrona is the "bra fence" which hosts a collection of discarded underwear and now is a promotion which seeks donations for the Breast Cancer Society.



Once in Wanaka, which sits on a beautiful lake, we had a drink and then walked around the town for a while before returning to Queenstown by the same route. I managed a short walk before we began to get ready for an early dinner. Tonight, we ate at The Bunker, which we had enjoyed on a previous visit. We both chose the five-course tasting menu which was excellent. The lamb, especially, was delicious and the service was very good and attentive.

And we had another sunset view from our hotel balcony.



Sunday January 15

We walked to breakfast and sat outside on a beautiful sunny morning with a temperature near 70F at 9am. After breakfast, we checked out and left Queenstown for Dunedin on the southeast coast. It was a beautiful drive, which took us almost six hours with stops for photo shoots and lunch at a lovely old hotel in the village of Clyde.

The first hour or so was through the mountains with scenery much like that we had left in Queenstown. Much of the drive was alongside a river and/or the lake formed by the building of the dam just outside Clyde where we stopped.



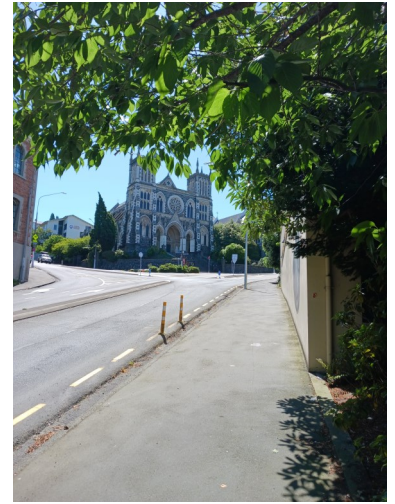
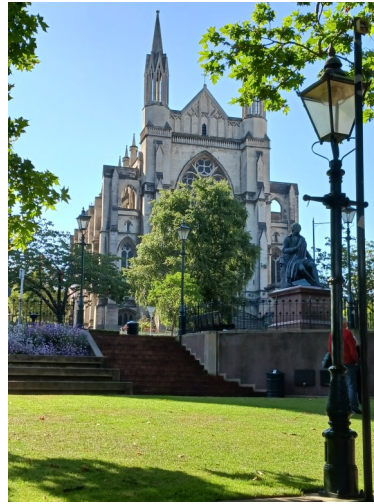
After Clyde the scenery became much less mountainous and more like the southern part of Scotland, with high rolling hills and vast views in all directions. Much of the terrain was taken up by farmland – cattle, deer, grain and lots of sheep. Every small town that we passed through appeared to be quite prosperous and the houses and other buildings were well maintained.

Closer to Dunedin, the land became much flatter, although there were hills at a distance both right and left of the road. We drove across this broad valley – again farmland – until we caught our first glimpses of the sea near Dunedin. We checked in about 4pm and I took a walk to scout out the restaurants we would be visiting on the two nights of our stay. The first impression that I got of the town was one of very steep hills (we remembered that from our previous visit) and some amazing buildings. On my short walk I saw two magnificent churches and a beautiful Victorian railway station, amongst many others.

Tonight, we ate at the Harbourside Grill overlooking the water. The venue had been the customs house, so the building was interesting if a little spartan in its décor. However, the meal and service were very good on a slow Sunday evening.

Monday January 16

Today we did a walking tour of the central business district of Dunedin. We walked from the hotel about ½ mile to The Octagon, which is the main “square” in town but surprisingly free of traffic. Here we found a place to have breakfast in a very popular little café.



Three of the many churches of Dunedin

We visited the Anglican Cathedral (St Paul’s) which is very imposing on the outside, less so inside. However, we learned that there had been a fire in the church two years ago and much of the altar area was damaged, with renovation and reconstruction still taking place.



St Paul's Cathedral (above)

The Octagon (right)

We then walked around The Octagon and admired many of the civic and commercial buildings. As well as a statue of Robert Burns. The city is named after Edinburgh, taking the Gaelic version of “Dunedin”. Dunedin had been built on gold from the mines in the Otago area so there had been lots of money in the late 19th century. The gold rush itself continued into the 20th century and “officially” ended as late as 1937.





We walked down to the attractive Anzac Square and then admired the railway station, before walking back to the hotel, stopping for a light lunch along the way – once again we were able to sit outside on a beautiful, sunny day



ANZAC Square and the Railway Station
(Tour train runs today!)

I took a short walk later in the afternoon and tested myself on a few of the very steep hills that this city has. 1 ½ miles on this terrain were sufficient in the sun.

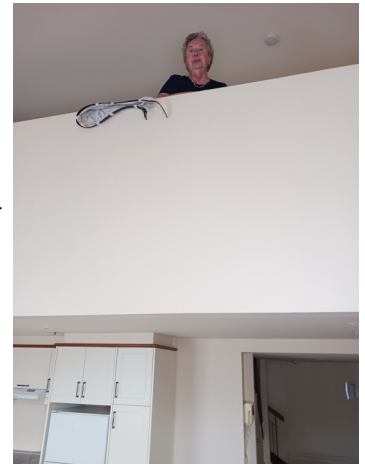
Tonight, we ate at Bacchus, a restaurant upstairs overlooking The Octagon. The meal and service were excellent and the second-floor view across the square towards the cathedral was extremely pleasant.

Tuesday January 17

We walked to breakfast at the Catalyst and then checked out of the hotel for our drive to Christchurch. The road north gave us occasional glimpses of the ocean but for much of the way we were inland and traveling through more farmland with rolling hills to the west. Closer to Christchurch we were now on the famed Canterbury Plain – famous from our grammar school lessons for its sheep and (we now realize) orchards of all types of fruit.

There were quite a few towns and villages en route but we had difficulty finding anywhere for a stop and a coffee. However, about 90 minutes south of Christchurch, we did come across a nice little café where we were able to enjoy a mid-afternoon snack.

We checked in the Heritage Hotel on Cathedral Square before 4pm and were given a two-floor suite. Obviously, it was quite expensive, but it provided lots of room to spread out for three nights here. I went for a short walk in the area near the hotel to renew my memory of this beautiful city.



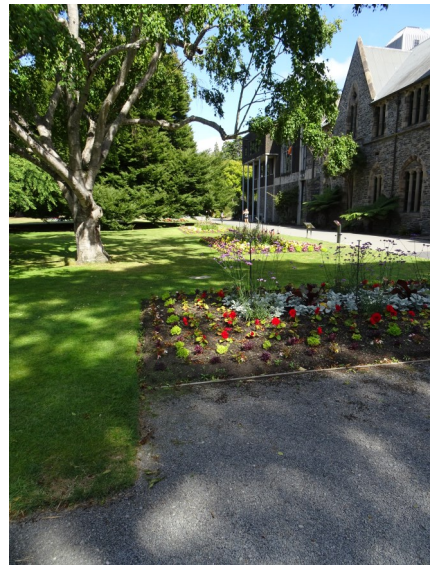
This statue was sculpted by
KATHLEEN SCOTT FR SBS
(1878-1947)
widow of
CAPTAIN SCOTT
and was unveiled in 1917.

A Statue of Scott of the Antarctic sculpted by his wife

Later, we took an Uber to dinner at Fiddlesticks. We had eaten here at least once before and were not disappointed with tonight's meal.

Wednesday January 18

We walked to breakfast at a café in the library just across the square from the hotel and then bought tickets for the Christchurch tram. This does a figure eight circuit around the center city and has hop on/hop off capability. For reasons not totally clear, one loop was closed on our initial tour, so we made our first stop at the botanical gardens. Here we spent over two hours wandering in the gardens with its flora from all over the world – including some enormous trees. The lawns and gardens border the Avon River and are a major attraction for locals and tourists alike.



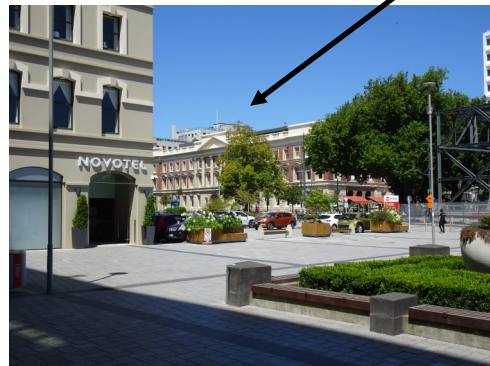
***Botanical
Gardens***





From the gardens we took the tram to the Quake City Museum, a well organized and interesting series of memorabilia, films, pictures and interactive exhibits on the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes that did so much damage to central Christchurch. As Molly said when we left, we didn't actually learn a lot new but it was still interesting to see the events captured so well and to learn of the history of quakes in New Zealand – and the renovation and re- building for the future.

After a light lunch, we were able to take the second loop of the tram ride, as well as continuing round the earlier loop back to the hotel.



***Christchurch
Cathedral
undergoing ren-
ovations (left)
Our hotel (right)***

I then took a short walk, and we went to dinner at Bessie, another restaurant less than a mile from the hotel. This had a very nice ambiance, and we enjoyed another great meal with good service – despite our waiter being new and having to check our orders several times!

Thursday January 19

We walked across the street for breakfast (in the library) again and then got the car for a drive to Lyttleton. We missed the turning that would have taken us over the Summit Pass but it was still a very scenic ride to the port with some great views over the harbor. We walked along the one shopping/café street and had a light snack in one of the coffee shops.



Lyttelton

On the return, we were able to find Dyers Pass and the Summit Road, so we had not only spectacular views but some quite breathtaking driving. Unfortunately, the road was closed after several miles (perhaps as well we had missed it on the way out!) so we did a little re-tracing and then found our way back to Christchurch.



I went for a walk and then we had a mid-afternoon snack before relaxing until dinner time – once again at Fiddlesticks. And it was another good meal.

Friday January 20

We walked to breakfast and then checked out of the Heritage Hotel to begin our drive to Blenheim. We followed Route 1 the whole way and it was a wonderful drive with some spectacular and varied scenery. As soon as we were out of Christchurch we were once again in farmland but this time there were a few vineyards to complement the sheep, cattle and grain. The road was relatively flat but all around were rolling hills which stretched from the coast (the road was just a little inland) to the foothills of the Southern Alps to the west. We couldn't see any of the high peaks (at least not until we were much further north) as some low lying cloud obscured that distant view. The weather at our level was clear and bright and the peak temperature later in the day reached 86F.

The scenery reminded us both of England with glimpses of the Yorkshire Dales, the fields of Devon, the peaks of the Lake District – and just about any other part of Britain. The fact that the road was a two-lane highway that twisted and turned every few yards just added to the “1950s England” had known. The greens and browns were just the same although the trees were

varieties not known by us. Nevertheless, the “picture” was the same.

About 30 minutes south of Kailoura, the road climbed rather steeply to perhaps 1000 feet or so and the peaks to the north became more jagged and pronounced, making us think that perhaps we were entering the Highlands. However, we just as quickly descended to sea level and we were now on the coast overlooking rock and pounding waves. At first we couldn't see very far as a sea mist blanketed the coastline, but by the time we stopped for lunch in Kaikoura it was once again clear, bright and hot.



We had lunch sitting outside in a courtyard and spent a few minutes watching the waves before setting off north again. Now we were driving at sea level and could see vast beaches, rocky cliffs and lots of surf. Occasionally the road climbed a little to enhance the view but generally it followed a narrow path below the now steep hills to the west – along with its companion railway. It reminded me very much of the east coast of Taiwan from our visit a few years ago.

At 4pm we arrived in Blenheim (now in the heart of Marlborough wine country) and checked into the Hotel d'Urville, a fine 1923 building that had been the Public Trust Office until converted to a small boutique hotel early this century.



I had time for a short walk through the very quiet town before dinner, which was in the hotel restaurant. We both enjoyed our meals in pleasant surroundings.

Saturday January 21

We were up about 8:30 and had breakfast in the hotel restaurant. After a very short walk in town, we checked out and drove 26 Km to Picton, where we would later get the ferry across Cook Strait to Wellington on the North Island. We parked in the town center and soon found out that there was a local





event taking place on the waterfront. It had the ingredients of a local fete that one might have expected in England in the fifties – “magicians” for the kids, a tug-o-war, face painting, etc. For us, it was an interesting diversion that helped fill the time before our ferry departed at 2:15.

On board, we had a sandwich lunch and then found seating for the crossing, which would take 3 ½ hours. We happened to sit in an area where a local magician was entertaining the kids, so once again we were not only reminded of earlier times but saw some free entertainment.

The crossing spends about one third of the time in the sheltered area around Picton and a similar amount of time in the bay approaching Wellington. In the middle, the crossing of the Strait is in open waters and notoriously choppy much of the time. Today, we had six feet swells and we rolled quite a bit but otherwise it was okay. I wouldn't have wanted to spend too much longer in those conditions, however – perhaps a taste of what's to come on our cruise?

We arrived in Wellington and picked up another rental car, having dropped off our first in Picton. Rental cars are not allowed on the car ferry so “one” rental covering both islands involves a switch of cars. Today, the transition was essentially seamless. We picked up the second car easily and drove the few miles to our hotel in the middle of Wellington.

Tonight, we ate at Dockside (a short Uber ride) which is a restaurant that we have enjoyed several times in the past – and one that did not disappoint today.



Sunday January 22

We were up, packed and on the road by 9am, having decided to drive out of town before getting breakfast. This turned out to be a longer drive than we might have expected and it was almost an hour later before we found a café for tea and a muffin. The drive so far took us steeply out of Wellington and on a fast motorway into the hills before dropping down to the typical farmland, with undulating hills and some higher peaks in the distance. We were essentially on the west coast of the North island at this point, but after our stop we headed in a northeasterly direction and further inland.

We climbed some to what looked like the high desert areas of New Mexico and the similarity was further enhanced by a few snow-capped peaks to our left. Sandia Peak? The terrain was definitely desert-like but the ground cover was greener (even some trees) than the typical tumbleweed and scrub of the American West. My guess is that we weren't as high, either, perhaps a couple of thousand feet at the most.

After our second stop for a light lunch in the courtyard of a nice café, the terrain changed again to the much more mountainous scenery typical of the central portion of this island. The weather also changed from bright sunshine to overcast and cloudy as we climbed and the temperature dropped into the mid-sixties. Eventually we were on the edge of Lake Taupo, formed as a result of a massive volcanic eruption, so we were now on the edge of a massive caldera. We stopped in a park



overlooking the lake to take a short nap, before continuing around the eastern edge to the city of Taupo and then northeast to Rotorua. By now we were in the very green rolling hills typical of the area around Rotorua and we passed through a number of thermal areas – including one which was the site of a huge thermal generating facility.

For the last hour we drove through intermittent light rain, but this had passed by the time we reached our hotel around 4:30, after a long and interesting day of driving. The forecast is for sunshine again tomorrow, so we are looking forward to exploring this amazing part of the country.

The view from our hotel across Lake Rotorua

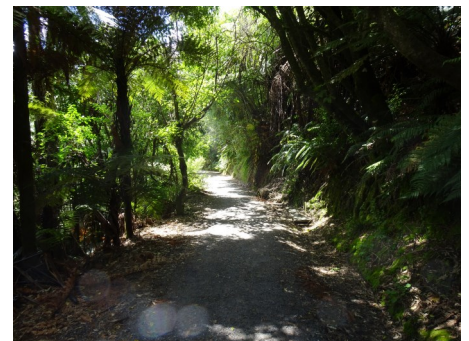
Tonight we ate at Mokoai, a restaurant about 15 minutes' drive from the center of town in a small hotel overlooking the lake. The place was almost deserted, but we had good service and a very nice meal in a pleasant ambiance.

Monday January 23

We drove about 1/2 mile to breakfast at a café overlooking the lake and then started our drive to the Waimangu Volcanic Valley about 30 minutes south of town. This is a very interesting site since the eruption that caused this huge thermal area occurred in 1866, so exact dating and accurate accounts (including some photographs) are available. It had been a relatively barren hillside and perhaps the most amazing aspect of the site is that it is now an extremely lush and heavily forested area. For this growth to have occurred in about 150 years following such an event the deposits from the eruption must have contained all the right ingredients. Normally centuries are needed for even the smallest green shoots to appear.

The park walk begins on the outer edge of the crater and extends about 2 ½ miles down to Lake Rotomahana, passing two lake craters formed during the eruption of 1886 and areas formed in a subsequent major event of 1903. There is even a now filled crater that had formed as late as 1973. It is an extremely active area and steam rises from almost every piece of ground and all the waters have bubbling "geysers". There are also some spectacular colorations from deposits and bacteria or algae in the waters.

The guide pamphlet gives lots of information on the event, its effects and the re-growth of the area and good descriptions are available for over 30 observation points on the walk. A bus is available to bring walkers back to the visitor center, so Molly took advantage of that while I walked further to the lake and then part-way back before taking the bus. It was a very interesting experience (although we have done it previously) and – with a snack before our return – took up most of the day.



Waimangu Volcanic Valley

Tonight, we ate at Leonardo's, an Italian restaurant across the street from the hotel. It was typical of many eateries in the center of Rotorua – busy, "rustic", but we had a very nice meal with great service.

Tuesday January 24

We woke today to rain! This was the first time on this trip that the weather actually interfered with our day. We started out by walking to breakfast and then along a few shopping streets but everywhere seemed quiet and deserted (although there were many parked cars!) so we returned to the hotel hoping for a break in the rain later in the day. Indeed, we did get a break which gave us chance for a mid-afternoon coffee at Starbucks and gave me a later walk.

Tonight, we ate at the Regent restaurant in a small hotel close to ours. It was very quiet but we had an excellent meal with great, friendly service.

Wednesday January 25

We had breakfast at the café just up the road (where we chatted with a very nice family on holiday from Tahiti) and then checked out of our hotel for the drive to Auckland. It was less than a three-hour drive, the last 75 miles or so on motorway, so – with one stop for lunch – we were in Auckland by 2pm. We checked in the Hilton on the waterfront and then I returned the car in town. It was an easy walk back to the hotel.

We then relaxed on our balcony overlooking the wharf where our cruise ship will dock early tomorrow morning and which we shall board in the early afternoon. Elizabeth and Chip arrived at the hotel around 6pm and we all went for dinner (and a good catch-up chat) at the Harborside Grille, a 15-minute walk away in the old ferry terminal. (Right) We sat in the sheltered outdoor area and had a very pleasant meal and a good time catching up on the past couple of weeks. It was almost 11 by the time we got to bed.



Thursday January 26



We were up about 9 and Molly and I walked to the end of the pier for a very light breakfast. We then finished packing and checked out at 11am. We sat in the lobby until it was time to check in for the cruise. This was right next to the hotel and the process went rather quickly such that we were having our first meal on board soon after 2pm. We then fully unpacked (!) and spent time finding our way around the cabin and the ship and generally relaxing until it was time to sail at 6pm.



We sailed out of Auckland harbor on an overcast and windy late afternoon but still had some nice views of the city skyline. The wind suggested that we might have bumpy night but we rarely felt much movement. We had a pre-dinner drink in the lounge before Eliza-

beth and Chip joined us for our first dinner on board – which lasted until almost 11pm!

Friday January 27

We didn't wake up until after 9:30 so we missed breakfast in the main dining room. However, we were able to get breakfast on Deck 14 at the buffet and we had a seat near the window overlooking the peninsula on which Tauranga sits. Not that we could see much as the mist and rain had come down and visibility was minimal. Elizabeth and Chip decided to walk into town, but Molly and I stayed on board and made use of our balcony.

The rain continued all day so we remained on board, having a late lunch and an afternoon nap. We met Elizabeth and Chip for drinks around 7:30 and then went our separate ways for dinner – they having decided on one of the specialty restaurants. We dined in the main dining room.

Saturday January 28

Despite the forecast and the captain's warnings, the overnight sail had been relatively smooth. We got up before 8am so that we could have breakfast in the main dining room. We then stayed on board until 11am, when we went ashore for an excursion in and around Napier. The weather was still very poor for sightseeing (heavy rain and low cloud) but the four hour excursion was interesting. We toured part of the huge Hawkes Bay wine growing area (second to Marlborough) and were told about some of the more famous (and costly) selections from here. Apparently, a good number of the wines are bought as an investment so it may be several years before it is drunk – giving the original purchaser a good profit!

The countryside in the region is extremely attractive (again very reminiscent of England) and, despite the rain, we enjoyed the tour. Back in Napier, we picked up a local guide (originally from Brighton, England) who obviously has specialized in the Art Deco style of architecture for which Napier is famous. A 1931 earthquake demolished much of the town and the initial re-building was in the style of the thirties – Art Deco. Over the years this style and a number of close relatives predominated and in the latter part of the 20th century, Napier decided that this should be protected and enhanced. Today, any new building has to contain some form of Art Deco in its architecture and the existing structures are being maintained (at least externally) in that same style. As a result, the town attracts visitors from all over the world to see the architecture and is particularly busy during a February festival in which the whole town participates – with Thirties-style entertainment, food and dress.



We ended the tour at the Art Deco Preservation building where we saw a short film on the town before and after the quake, the massive rebuilding effort and, of course, the festival. We agreed that the excursion had been worthwhile despite the less than ideal conditions.

Back on board, we had a late afternoon snack before we sailed (at 5pm) and then we prepared for our dining experience at one of the specialty restaurants on board. It was a very nice Italian restaurant and all four of us enjoyed our meals.

A wet day in and around Napier

Sunday January 29

It was overcast again as we arrived in Picton at the north end of the South Island. We had sailed through the Cook Strait and along one of the many inlets to our berth near the village but in a commercial wharf stacked high with pine logs. We had

learned yesterday that Monterey Pine is one of the largest exports from this country and judging by the thousands of logs here, we could certainly believe it. Apparently, the planting-to-harvesting cycle is only about 20 years in this climate, versus the 80 in its native North America—hence its viability as a world-wide seller.

We had breakfast in the buffet restaurant on the 14th deck and then I went for a walk on the walking track on the same level. It rained most of the time so I got really wet but the worst part was that the circular track is only 0.11 miles around, so I had to make 28 laps to get in my three miles!



We had a snack before our 1pm shore excursion. This was billed as a Marlborough Panorama and, while we did see acres of vines and several wineries whose name we recognized, the rest of the tour was quite disappointing.

Of the three hours, 1 ¼ were spent in a park (very nice, with some beautiful gardens but not worth one third of the trip) and 45 minutes in a “shopping center”, a shop, café and wine



tasting area at the side of the road! We couldn't do a tasting as they had to be pre-booked, but we did manage to get a glass of wine as a saving grace. We were back on board by 4:15pm.

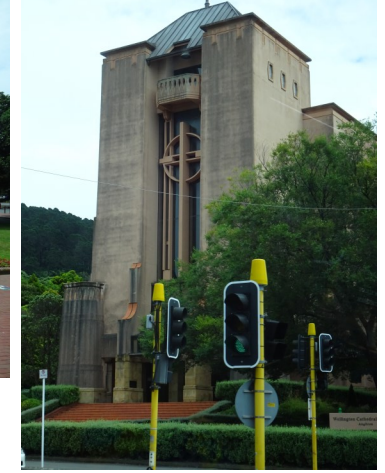
Tonight we ate in the main dining room again with Elizabeth and Chip.

Monday January 30

We were up in time for breakfast in the main dining room and I went for a short walk (on a dry but overcast day) before our 11am Cultural Wellington tour. We stopped at the old and new houses of parliament, saw a number of historic buildings in



The Parliamentary Library flanked by the old and new parliament buildings



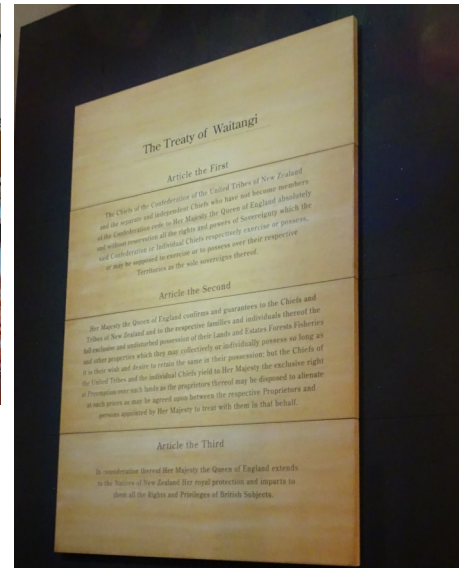
Katherine Mansfield Home, the magnificent railway station and the Anglican Cathedral

the downtown area (including the railway station) and then stopped for over an hour at the birthplace of Katherine Mansfield. I suspect that I wasn't the only person that had never heard of her but she was a well-respected writer in the latter years of the 19th century. The house was interesting to visit, but 20 minutes would have been sufficient.

Next, we were taken to the Te Papa national museum which we have enjoyed on several previous visits to Wellington. Here we had an excellent guide (native German but came to New Zealand as a girl) who did a super job of taking us through the Māori history and culture, including the "misinterpretation" of the original treaty between and the native aboriginals.



Inside the Te Papa Museum



After an hour or more she finished and gave us time for a further 30 minutes of visiting other parts of the museum – including the coffee shop, which was our choice.

We then returned to the ship and I had time for another short walk before we sailed at 6pm and started to get ready for another dinner at the Tuscan Grille – and a very pleasant chat with Elizabeth and Chip.

Tuesday January 31

We awoke to the sight of Lyttleton harbor – a place we had visited by car less than two weeks ago! We had breakfast and time on board before our 2pm tour, which was a double decker bus ride from Lyttleton to Christchurch and back. We drove the quick way via the 2Km long tunnel through the hillside and were soon in the suburbs of the city. We were first taken to an overlook where we had tremendous views of the city, the Pacific Ocean, and the land towards the Southern Alps, although it was





Christchurch Overlook and the park

just a little too far to make out any mountains on this hazy day. We then drove to a very nice park in the city and were able to stroll around the lawns, rose beds and trees. This park is almost contiguous with the one on which the botanical gardens sit, so I wondered why we didn't go to the more famous site. Perhaps it's just too big or a little short on bus parking. In any event, we had been there two weeks earlier.



We then spent almost an hour driving around the city center and were given a good commentary on the earthquakes and the re-building process. It really is a lovely city and will be very attractive once back to its pre-earthquake days. We were driven back to the ship via the coast road and up Mt Evans pass for some great views of Lyttelton harbor and our ship at dock. Dinner tonight was in the main dining room and once again we closed it down at 11pm.

Wednesday February 1

This was an "at sea" day and when we awoke, we were actually stationary about 40 Km off the southeast coast of the South Island. Apparently, we have time to kill before arriving in Dunedin tomorrow morning. We had breakfast and then I spent over 1 ½ hours walking – round and round the 1/8-mile track on Deck 14. We were moored for many hours, during which time I was able to walk quite a bit more before we sailed late in the afternoon.

Tonight, we joined Elizabeth and Chip again for dinner at Le Petit Chef Qsine. This was an unusual presentation for which there were four courses, with a choice for each. Before each course, the lights dimmed and a projection of a little chef appeared on our plates and he proceeded to discuss the preparation of what we were about to eat. In addition, the whole table was an animated display depicting the country associated with each course. It was most unusual, a lot of fun – and another good meal!

