

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

6 Oct 22 to 20 Feb 23

6 Oct 22 – Bangkok to Adelaide

Arrived in Adelaide yesterday from Bangkok, took a while to get through bio security in Sydney, even had a bio security dog do a walk around us and several others before we could get a transfer to the domestic terminal for our flight to Adelaide.

Our friend Di, who is joining us for part of our journey, had already arrived from London via Singapore and was waiting for us in the Food Court in the domestic terminal. It was pouring down with rain in Sydney and looks like they are in for some stormy weather over the weekend, let's hope it clears up before we return in a couple of weeks time in the motorhome.

Took a taxi to our accommodation, a two bed apartment at [Hume Serviced Apartments](#) which was in the East of the city. Very big and pleasant apartment and a 15 min walk into the centre of the city.

7 Oct 22 - Adelaide

Took a walk around Adelaide to look at the sights. Ventured into the Adelaide Oval a 53,500 seater cricket stadium, which can be used for other sports and from which you can do a climb onto the stand roof which is 50m above ground!



The Oval was near the river and saw a small circular boat complete with driver, providing a BBQ lunch, looked fun. Central Market was fabulous so much choice and delicious food, came back later in the day for supplies. Had a late lunch in Harry's balcony bar, reasonably priced food and drinks. Walked our socks off - 20k plus steps!

8 Oct 22 – Kangaroo Island

Long but fabulous day at Kangaroo Island, with Sealink Ferries, getting up at 5am and not returning until 10.30pm, but what a day!



It was a two hour drive from Adelaide to Cape Jervis where we caught the 45 min ferry to Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island and met by our driver Scott.

First visit was to Seal Bay beach, to see Australian Sealions who come to the bay to rest after 3 days at sea finding food. They swim out to the Continental Shelf, some 60km away, for the larger cephalopods, like octopus, squid and cuttle fish, which also

provides them with moisture. One sealion has been recorded diving to a depth of 274m, 15 mins underwater!



Next was lunch at Vionne Bistro, most of which was destroyed in the fire, they were using three container units as a temporary kitchen until they are able to rebuild. We then visited Flinders Chase National Park and the Remarkable Rocks, where we saw a small monitor lizard known locally as Goannas and then The Arch and a few more sealions.



Final visit and highlight of the day was the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park where we got the opportunity to walk amongst and feed the kangaroos and get in close contact with koalas and wallabies. Unfortunately, we only had a choice of feeding kangaroos or holding a koala so we chose the kangaroos. Couldn't of had a better end to the day on the Island, but there was the ferry ride and coach back to Adelaide still to go.

Kangaroo Island was devastated by fire in

late 2019 and over 40% of the vegetation, buildings and countless animals were lost. Recovery is slow, as you can imagine after such a loss,



but progressing. The local aboriginal name is Death Island due to incidents like this over the centuries. There is a lot of rocks that attract lightning on the island which has caused destruction in the past. Follow this link for an article about the devastating fire in 2019

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/.../well-come.../>

9 Oct 22 – Adelaide

Started the day with sorting out our washing before we set off in our motorhome tomorrow. Then took the free bus on it's circular route around the city and North Adelaide and got off near the cathedral, which strangely on a Sunday was completely shut up. Walked by the river before heading off into the Botanic Park and Botanical Gardens, saw loads of bats, birds and flora on our way. Spent a lovely afternoon there, met a couple Maryann & Tony, from Sydney who were there for an Almond Conference (they are in the industry) and shared a table with them for coffee, seems Australia is having the same problems as the UK with loads of job vacancies and no-one to fill the positions. Ate a late lunch of schnitzel, huge portions before heading back to the apartment.



10 Oct 22 – Adelaide to Keith



Left our apartment today and picked up our Britz Motorhome, however when we got there they had given us an upgrade to a Maui Motorhome which are basically newer versions, 1-2 years old rather than 3-4 years old.



Headed to our first destination of Hahndorf a German town established in 1839, very touristy but quaint and I decided to buy myself a black opal, inlaid into sterling, silver ring. Set off for Keith for our overnight stop and set up for our first night in the motorhome. Nigel cooked the pork chops we bought in Central Market on the BBQ, which comes out of the side of the motorhome. Sat outside for a little while whilst we ate our meal, but the flies were annoying so in we went. We had booked an ensuite site so nice to have bathroom facilities close by.



11 Oct 22 – Keith to Warrambool

It was a long drive of over 400km, we had decided to stop in Mount Gambier and the Blue Lake, also needed to visit a supermarket to stock up and put fuel in the motorhome. Woolworths in Mount Gambier was our choice of supermarket and although a little expensive for our first shop, we have enough meals for a good few days, plus some cleaning supplies and obviously beer for Nigel. Blue Lake is a volcanic lake supplying Mount Gambier with water, it was impressive and at certain times of year the colour is really blue, but not for our visit.



Set off then for our overnight stop at Warrambool, only realising about the half hour we would lose when crossing the time zone just after Mount Gambier, our check in time was 6pm so ended up emailing the campsite to advise of late arrival, which was fine and we made it with five minutes to spare!

12 Oct 22 – Warrambool to Lorne

Today we started out on the Great Ocean Road with overcast skies but fortunately no rain. Along the road are various rock formations which included:

- Bay of Islands
- The Grotto – definitely worth the climb down the steps
- London Bridge – it looked like the London Bridge which was sold to Lake Havasu years ago
- Lord Ard Gorge – the location of the shipwreck Lord Ard
- Twelve Apostles – these come and go but generally there are 12 to see from the viewpoint, which also has a Visitor Centre. The rain then set in for the rest of the day.
- Cape Otway Lighthouse – unfortunately after a 12km drive found it was closed! On the way though we saw some white trees, which we believe were burnt and died in the 2019 bushfires, very dramatic
- Apollo Bay – lovely seaside town and even managed to dip my toe in the Southern Ocean



Our campsite is run by the local parks service and although more than sufficient, the rain had set in for the night and there was very little lighting, a walk to the toilet & shower block was a hazardous task.

13 Oct 22 – Lorne to Melbourne

We set off for Melbourne via Torquay which is another seaside town, but again due to the rain not much we could see.

We stopped at the Narana Aboriginal Cultural Centre which although still raining, was well worth the visit to see the emus, kangaroos and wallabies. They even had two emu chicks in the Visitor Centre, who were 3 & 7 days old, gorgeous with stripy patterned feathers, which they will lose as they grow older. We then walked through the animal pens and they had one joey (young male kangaroo) who wanted to play and kept jumping up at me and Nigel, didn't seem to like Di for some reason. We fed joey and a few of the emus before heading back to the Visitor Centre which had a good selection of Aboriginal art and crafts, obviously had to buy something, a mouse-mat for the laptop.



Arrived at our campsite in Melbourne, still in the rain and did our laundry, bit of shopping at a Chinese Supermarket nearby, such a huge selection.

14 Oct 22 – Melbourne

Had to take the motorhome into Maui first thing to sort out the dining table, as the securing clips had broken and the GPS had decided not to work. This was sorted quickly and we parked up again on the campsite and headed off for the bus into town. Melbourne uses the MYKI card for all transportation but you have to buy a card at AUS\$16 but the fare is only AUS\$10 for the whole day, you can't get the other AUS\$6 back but the cards last 3 years – not sure I will be back to Melbourne to take advantage of this!



Took about an hour to get into the centre on the bus, the traffic was awful. Got off near Flinders Street Station and from there walked around some of the Lanes, stopped for coffee & Danish at Brunetti Oro (they had some fabulous cakes on display), St Paul's Cathedral,



Federation Square, the riverside before getting on the free circular tram around town. We decided to get off at the Docklands to see the harbour and city view from there, which was impressive with some fabulous apartment blocks. Took the tram then to the other side of town to the Royal Exhibition Centre in Carlton Gardens, walked to St Patrick's and then a further coffee stop was in order at Cafe Excello before viewing the Parliament Building and Treasury Gardens, then taking a tram to the station to get a train back, as the bus took so long. Got off in Tottenham Station (lots of station names relate to English & Scottish names) and took the bus, which we waited ages for, again traffic horrendous to get back to the campsite. Long day but the rain held off for most of it, so we were lucky.



15 Oct 22 – Melbourne to Loch Sport, Gippsland Lakes

Negotiating the traffic out of Melbourne was a little difficult but we managed to get onto the right road eventually and headed to Moorabbin Air Museum, a little treat for Nigel as they had some usual aircraft including a Vickers Viscount (the first plane Nigel ever flew on), Canberra, Mirage, Meteor,

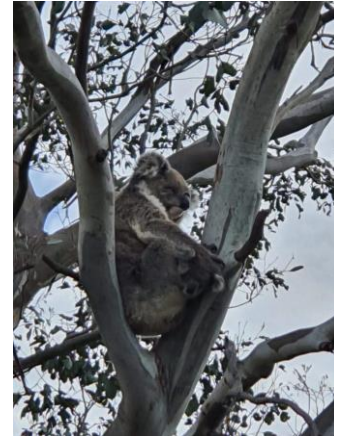
Westfield Wessex and a couple of "Huey's" and a 737 passenger plane, which had crashed in the Philippines and been purchased by the museum which you could view inside.



Set off again towards Gippsland Lakes and visited Golden Beach, part of Ninety Mile Beach facing the Southern & Pacific Oceans, saw a short nosed echidna crossing the road, before finding our campsite for the night at Loch Sport, basic but a fabulous view of the Lake from our motorhome.

16 Oct 22 – Gippsland Lakes to Jindabayne

Well a journey that should have taken 4 hours took nearly 8 as we didn't find out about the gravel road until it was too late to take an alternative route, so about 85kms on hardened earth through the Snowy Mountains, absolutely fabulous, but hard going. Saw a lot of wildlife on the way including koalas up in the trees, a male emu and two baby emus, kangaroos, deer and lots of birds including white cockatoos.



Our campsite for the night overlooked Jindabayne Lake, which is an alpine lake and stunning with the mountains in the background including Kosciuszko, Australia's highest peak at 7,310ft, although it was covered in cloud when we saw it in the evening and morning. The area is renowned for winter sports.

17 Oct 22 – Jindabayne to Canberra

Arrived at our campsite and once sorted took the local bus to Canberra central. Having been told we could pay cash on board found out that this wasn't the case and we needed a MyWay card or a ticket from a machine, although there was none nearby, so the driver kindly let us on for free, which was really kind. Managed to find a ticket machine in the central bus area and bought day passes for us all and then after some helpful instructions from the Information office caught a bus to the Australian War Memorial.



What a nightmare, the memorial site was being renovated and construction was happening all around the site, no signage to find the new temporary entrance, walked around the building and if it wasn't for some kind construction workers we would have never found the entrance.



The Memorial was not just a sculpture park but a huge museum recognising the part that Australia & New Zealand played in WW1, WW11 and ongoing wars. Fabulous but we needed a whole lot more time there to take in all the exhibitions.





One poignant painting for me was the Menin Gate at Midnight, which showed the Menin Gate and then ghost like images of all those lost “He is not missing, he is here”.

Took a bus back into town for something to eat and then a bus back to the John Gordon Building so we could view the Old Parliament Building and the new Parliament House behind it. Back to the campsite for the necessary laundry and domestics!

18 & 19 Oct 22 – Canberra to Katoomba, Blue Mountains

On our way to the Blue Mountains we made a stop at Bowral, had a lovely coffee and toastie in the Press Shop before taking a walk down “Bong Bong Street” and why wouldn’t you. The town is full of clothes and coffee shops, appeared to be a place for ladies who lunch, a lovely stop though and we managed to get some food shopping in at the local Aldi.

Our journey to the Blue Mountains was not what we expected, very built up, arrived at our campsite which was just across the road from the Katoomba Falls. Once sorted took a walk across but unfortunately the mist came down and we could see very little but very haunting atmosphere.

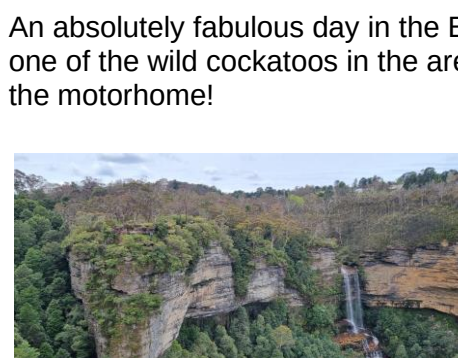
Next day we took a walk to the Falls, sun was shining thankfully, just as we started the track to the Falls saw two Lyre Birds in the underbrush, which someone told us to watch out for, otherwise they blended in so well we would have missed them.



The views from the lookouts to the various Falls, the Three Sisters, the Orphan Rock and Blue Mountains, named for the blue haze which is evident when you view them from a distance especially today were fabulous.



Took a walk then up to Scenic World, where there is the steepest train ride in the world with a 52 degree incline into Jamison Valley, cableway which descends 545m into the Valley and a Skyway across to the Cliff Top Viewpoint which at 270m is the highest cable car in Australia. Walked through the Jurassic Rainforest, where they originally used to mine coal in the late 1800s, in six months they mined over 65k tonnes, in terrible conditions and they started at the age of 14. We followed the Gruffalo Trail, Di’s Grandkids love Gruffalo so why not and they were also starting to set out a Dinosaur Trail which will be ready in mid November, they were just siting the T-Rex head as we walked by.



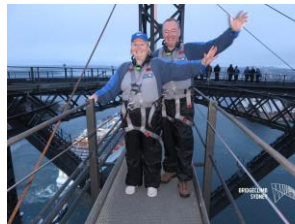
An absolutely fabulous day in the Blue Mountains and to top it all one of the wild cockatoos in the area decided to come visit us at the motorhome!



20 Oct 22 – Sydney

On our way to Sydney we took a side trip to Palm Beach, where Home & Away is filmed as Di was an avid fan and wanted to see some of the filming locations, including the beach, diner (which had been demolished), the lighthouse and surf club.

Once we had booked into our caravan site for the night we took a taxi into Sydney, the Metro was about 20+ minutes walk and it was raining heavily. We had booked Nigel & Di onto the Sunset Climb of Sydney Harbour Bridge and they did it, they climbed for approx 2 hours, after some training and being kitted out in the safety gear, it was longer than usual as the clouds came in and a cruise ship was leaving the harbour, which was unusual so they crew delayed the return down the ladders and steps. The rain held off in the main just the odd bit now and then. Huge sense of achievement for them both.



21 Oct 22 – Sydney

Spent the day in Sydney yesterday, joined the Free Walking Tour by a local. We met at the Town Hall and there were roughly 80 participants, which they split into two groups and we were led by Ross one of the founders of the company. Headed off to the Queen Victoria Building, into some underground passages and then Hyde Park.



Past the Rum Hospital, so called because the sale of rum paid for it! Down Martin Place which is the banking area to the War Memorial, this area was used to film Matrix and Superman Returns. Saw some of the artwork in the Lanes, like the hanging birdcages.

Then onto the Customs House, just outside of which the English first set foot in Australia. Inside in the floor is a model of Sydney Town Centre and it is free to go in.

On to Circular Quay, the Museum of Art, a view of the Opera House and The Rocks where we finished, Ross gave lots of interesting info along the way.

We then hopped on the Manley ferry and took a 30 ride before returning on the same ferry fifteen minutes later. Excellent views of the harbour for not a lot of money.

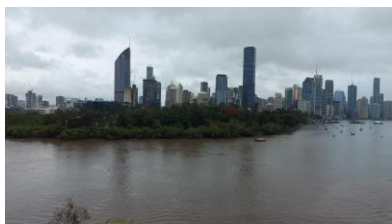
Took a walk around to the Opera House for a close-up view. Impressive but it seems the best way to see inside is go to a performance at the Concert Hall which unfortunately we couldn't manage in the time we had.

22 Oct 22 – Woolgoolga

On the way to Woolgoolga we stopped at Tyndale for a drink at Qi Coffee and then on to Port Macquarie, as the weather was on the windy side we just pulled into Flynn's Beach for a quick walk around before getting to the campsite next to the Beach at Woolgoolga. Nigel & Di went off for provisions and I stayed to do the laundry, unfortunately a necessity on our travels. The weather had not improved so we took a wet walk to Sea Salt Fish & Chip shop in the town for three portions of fish & chips, prawn cutlets and a prawn spring roll – excellent.



23 & 24 Oct 22 – Noosa



Today to reach Noosa from Woolgoolga, stopped off at Byron Bay, had a hot chocolate in one of the hotels on the beach but didn't stay long at the weather was definitely on the wet & windy side. Pulled into Kangaroo Point just south of the Storey Bridge in Brisbane for a spot of lunch with a view of the cityscape of Brisbane, had decided not to visit to the city centre as it was just another city, I am sure the residents of Brisbane would feel differently. Arrived at Noosa late afternoon in our campsite and set up for the evening.

Next day we drove into Noosa Marina, had a bit of a struggle finding a parking place for the motorhome, but eventually were successful after Di talked to one of the local council who suggested a long term parking area, it seems they are really hot here on illegal parking and issue fines regularly. Took the Noosa Ferry from the Marina to Hastings Street at Noosa Heads, a definite posh Blackpool type town but we managed to get ourselves a coffee before we returned to the Marina for lunch and a cocktail.



25 & 26 Oct 22 – Childers (near Bundaberg) & Clairview

Two days travelling to get to Airlie Beach. Bundaberg was interesting took a tour around the Bundaberg Rum Distillery, really good tour including two full measures of a large selection of rums. The company did a lot to help the town in the 2013 floods. The town is also famous for Ohana Cider and Ginger Beer, but one tasting was enough. Stopped overnight at Childers in a National Park with kangaroos for company, but they were a little camera shy.



Set off the next day and stopped off in Miriam Vale a very small town for coffee and a delicious sausage roll. Next stop was Rockhampton a huge town in comparison for a bit of lunch. Our overnight stop was at Barracrab Tourist Park which was right on the beach, a little crowded but fabulous views. Laundry day again, there were more bugs in there and the sink basins in the toilets than seen before on our journey, just how many times you can be bitten, but only the odd one or two by the time we left.

27 & 28 Oct 22 – Airlie Beach



Arrived at our caravan park in Airlie Beach today in time for the bird feeding at 4pm, such a noisy racket, they will eat from your hand, but their claws are very sharp, but an enjoyable experience. Birds were mainly Rainbow Lorikeets and Plumed Whistling Ducks. Also saw some Bush Stoned Curlews next to our site.



Sailing boat trip on the Providence to Whitsunday Islands. What an experience! Took nearly three hours to get to out to Tonge Bay on the other side of Whitsunday Island. From here we took a 20 walk up hill to the lookouts (they said 10 mins but rather ambitious and a bit of a struggle for me), fabulous views of Whitehaven Beach. The beach is famous for its sand being 99% silica in fact NASA used the sand to make a lens for the Hubble telescope because of its purity.

Then downhill and across another 20 min walk up and down (again supposedly 10!) to Whitehaven Beach, voted one of the best beaches in the World and lived up to its reputation. Ticket to Paradise has recently been filmed here (although its supposed to be Bali) and Pirates of the Caribbean. Got back into the dinghy to get back onboard, definitely didn't manage this without getting our feet wet. Lunch whilst on our way to the snorkel point. Di took the plunge but we didn't, not keen on wearing the stinger suits (the area has small 1-2cm irukandji jelly fish which cause loss of function if not treated and too small for stinger nets). Unfortunately, the reef was not very clear and Di didn't manage to see much.



Set off under sail through a very rough passage, everything on an angle, so we were moved to the other side of the boat, bit hair-raising, got absolutely soaked from the waves over the bows for the rest of the return journey! Had a great time despite this, though two plastic glasses of champagne may of helped, even if with added salt water to enhance the taste.

As we neared the harbour a storm was lingering overhead and we just managed to dock and get in our bus back to the campsite, but the heavens opened when we got there and we ended up waiting in the reception area until it died down before heading to our motorhome. Thankfully we managed to get pizza delivered for our tea!

29 & 30 Oct 22 - Townsville

On our way from Airlie Beach to Townsville we spotted the signs for the Billabong Sanctuary and decided to stop and so glad we did. We saw so much wildlife and I got to cuddle a koala, hold a black headed python and a crocodile. Walked through the koala enclosure and saw them being fed, saw my first wombat, tree kangaroo and cassowary. Watched them feed Junior the crocodile. Fed more kangaroos, wallabies, emus and the flocks of ducks following us around as they knew we had food. Brilliant and unexpected stop wouldn't have missed it for the world.



Headed off on the ferry the next day to Magnetic Island, turned up at the wrong Quay, hadn't realised there were two companies but still managed to get the 9.30am ferry. Caught the local bus to Horseshoe Bay where there was a local Crafts Market, brunch and then returned to Townsville for our second BBQ since we started - fresh corn on the cob (given to us free on one of our coffee stops), steak, prawns and salad (mind you the flies were annoying). Have a lakes view here in Townsville pretty impressive.

1 Nov 22 – Townsville to Port Douglas



Stopped off at Cardwell on our way North, had a lovely beachside walk, jetty and fabulous pies at Beardsley Bakery. Palm Cove our next stop was a very upmarket beach resort and then on to our lovely campsite in Port Douglas, like staying in a garden.

2 to 3 Nov 22 - Cairns

Took a trip on the Daintree River, didn't see many crocodiles, just one lurking in the mangroves, sensibly they were keeping cool underwater in the shady riverbanks. Did see a Piguan Frogmouth bird, very strange looking and some fiddler crabs. The area north of the river has a population of 500 who all live off grid! On way to Cairns pulled in at Rex Viewpoint and then to our campsite in Cairns, which was the best so far and last one of this part of the trip.



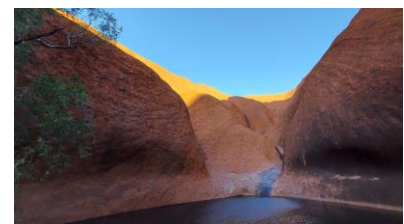
Great Barrier Reef



Took a catamaran boat tour to Moore Reef, about 2 hours to get there and unfortunately a pretty rough journey, lots of seasick passengers, but fortunately not us. Moored to a floating pontoon which gave easier access for snorkelling and diving, they also had a glass bottomed boat and underwater viewing area. Di our friend is a much more experienced snorkeller than me and had booked a reef tour, having found that they could take inexperienced people and with the waters being so choppy, I joined the tour and so glad I did. Ted our guide was so informative and pointed out loads of sea life including corals, anemones, parrot fish, clown fish and even Jessica turtle came to say hello as we finished our tour. A bucket list for me and so glad I did the tour as I was only going to snorkel near the pontoon.

4 & 5 Nov 22 – Uluru (Ayers Rock)

Flew from Cairns to Ayers Rock and picked up our hire car, much easier and similar cost to 3 hop on hop off bus tickets. First night we went to the Olgas (Kata Tjuta) for sunset, not as much colour changing as we imagined but pretty spectacular. These are a composite made of pebbles, mud etc, whereas Uluru is sandstone with iron oxide giving it some different colours where the iron is in abundance. Next day got up at 4.15am for the sunrise at Uluru, not so many people here and again colours changing as the sun rose in the sky behind us.



As it was only about 7.15am when we were finished, decided to do the Mutitjulu Waterhole Walk and then the Mala Walk which was led by Leroy, an indigenous Australian from South Australia and one of the Park Rangers, who explained all about this particular walk, with a number of caves enroute and finishing at the Kantju Gorge. This walk was a coming of age ceremony for local young men to learn about the way of life and how to cope in drought and intense heat. Excellent talk and informative about the Aboriginal way of life.



Took a trip to Uluru for the sunset tonight but unfortunately there was a lot of cloud which didn't show the colours very well.

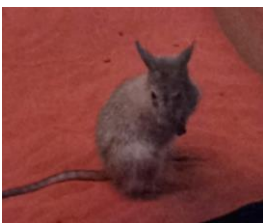
6 Nov 22 – Uluru to Alice Springs

Before we left Uluru visited the Cultural Centre, very interesting on how the area is now protected and managed by the indigenous and government bodies in partnership. To get to Alice Springs we took the AAT Kings bus transfer, which stopped for views of Mount Conner (Fuluru as it looks so similar to Uluru) and the salt flats, very nearly burnt my feet getting up the sand bank, as sand was TOO hot!



7 Nov 22 – The Ghan

As we were not getting on The Ghan until late afternoon, we visited the Alice Springs Desert Park Centre, not so much wildlife outside, it was too hot, but the Nocturnal House and aviaries were brilliant. Finally saw a Mala (Rufous Hare Wallaby), only found in captivity although they are trying to reintroduce into the wild, but cats and foxes are their main predator and brought them to near extinction. Lots of bird aviaries (saw a buzzard) and also some very weird looking reptiles!



Boarded The Ghan in the afternoon, after a long wait for the shuttle bus! One on our bucket list to travel by train in Australia. Our cabin was compact but did have a very small bathroom, swinging a cat though was not possible. Had crocodile dumplings for dinner, very nice but didn't taste like chicken. A

great evening, celebrating our 35th Wedding Anniversary and after a few glasses of wine retired for the evening.

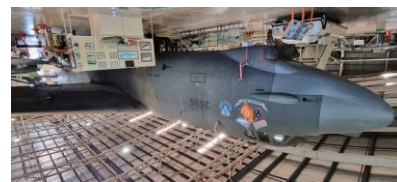




After a lovely breakfast took a trip to Nitmiluck Gorges, extremely hot at 40+ degrees. Very enjoyable and our guide was great giving loads of info especially how the land was returned to the indigenous people which again was working in partnership with the government departments to maintain and give everyone the chance to see the gorges. Lunch back on board and tried the buffalo curry, tastes like beef. Finally disembarked at 5.30pm and off to our hotel in Darwin for three nights, our final destination in Australia this year.

8 to 10 Nov 22 - Darwin

Darwin is nowhere near as big a city as imagined, only a few main streets, the Waterfront, Esplanade and a few nearby areas. First day was a haircut and a bit of shopping with Di, whilst Nigel went to the Military Museum. A walk around the Heritage Trail the next day, including a visit to the Royal Flying Doctors Museum for Nigel and Di and late lunch at the Waterfront.



On our last day in Australia we went of a city tour in the morning including the Aviation Museum, which has a B-52 bomber and other aircraft, the Museum and Art Gallery and scenic views on the Bays around Darwin. In the afternoon we went to the Spectacular Jumping Crocodile Tour and saw three crocs leaping for food, these are in the wild and only come for the food if they feel like it.



11 to 14 Nov 22 – Auckland

Bit of a journey in that our flight wasn't until 1am in the morning, transit at Melbourne and then delayed flight to Auckland finally arriving around 4.30pm local time. Took a while to clear the airport due to bio-screening and customs.

After a long day's travel we only managed to have dinner at the Lone Star restaurant across the road, fabulous food.

Sunday we took advantage of the local buses, after we found out we needed a At Hop card to pay the fare. Lovely Tamaki bus route to the Bays to the right of Auckland and had the best fish and chips for lunch, with of course a glass of NZ Sauvignon Blanc.



Waiheke Island on Monday on the ferry, famous for wine with 30 boutique vineyards. Took a bus to Onetangi Bay, would definitely live here, cocktails and a snack before returning to Auckland.

Sky Tower was our last visit of the day some 382m high with viewing platforms on floors 60 and 51. You can bungee jump and walk around the tower if you are feeling foolish! Not for us.

Dinner at the famous Tony's Steakhouse which was a delicious meal and would highly recommend.



15 to 17 Nov 22 - Rotorua



Picked up the campervan this morning and off to Rotorua, smaller than the previous one, few niggly problems but all sorted within couple of days.

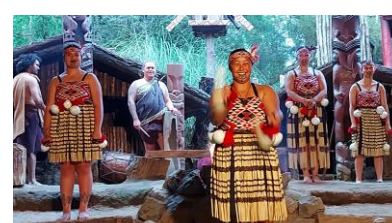
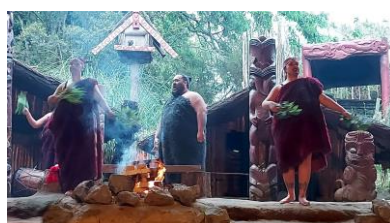
Rotorua was our first stopover at a caravan park with thermal pools and access to the hot beach on the lake. One of the pools was 42 degrees, little hot and max of 20 mins, but the other two were much cooler.



Did a fabulous tour of Hobbiton, 44 hobbit abodes on the original filming site. The original steps to Frodo's home still exist. Saw the artificial tree created for the Hobbit as the old one had been destroyed after the Lord of the Rings filming. Had a stout and cider in the Green Dragon. Thoroughly enjoyed the tour.



In the evening we went to the Mitai Moari cultural show. Again really good with traditional dance, songs and display of weapons including the war chant, the Haka. Dinner was a traditional hangi meal, which is cooked underground on manuka wood and lake rocks. Finished off with a tour of the original village, the sacred spring and the odd glowworm!



18 Nov 22 – Lake Taupo



Stopped off on our way from Rotorua at Huka Falls, spectacular vivid blue water at 220,000 litres per second over an 11 metre drop.



Craters of the Moon is a walkway through geothermal activity near Lake Taupo which emerged in the 1950s, when the underground water pressure was lowered by the local geothermal power station. Very strange sight to behold with steam

venting all over the area with the odd mud pool.



MacDonalds in Taupo has a DC3 as part of the restaurant and of course we had to stop for a photo! Stopped over in Motutere Bay on Lake Taupo, fabulous setting looking out over the lake and the black swans who decided to visit.



19 Nov 22 - Wellington



Drove on the desert road to Bulls, our coffee stop in the punniest town. Unfortunately the weather was against us when we arrived into Wellington, torrential rain which carried on until lunchtime the next day. Had a ride on the Cable Car (really a funicular on a cable).



There was an exhibition on in the harbour from other countries promoting tourism. Very large harbour with lots of artwork on display including a strange fountain. Lovely city to walk around. Took the Interislander Ferry to South Island the next day.



20 to 22 Nov 22 – Picton to Franz Josef Glacier via Owen River

Unfortunately the weather was not good for our first few days in South Island, having left the ferry we made our way to Whitehaven Winery for a tasting of their wines inc sauvignon blanc, pinot gris, rose and a sweet dessert wine, all very nice and obviously purchased a couple of bottles.

Stopped overnight at Owen River Tavern, decided against the lower field due to the flooding and lack of amenities, the landlady kindly let us stop at the top near the Tavern.



Made our way to the West Coast starting at Buller Gorge and the longest swing bridge in New Zealand, then Cape Foulwind, the seal colony and Punakaiki, for the famous pancake rock formations.



At Hokitika we took a tour of the Wildlife Centre and saw the two kiwi there, as they are nocturnal birds their enclosure is pretty dark and difficult to see but a lot bigger than I imagined, but no photos.

Arrived into Franz Josef later that evening ready for attempt to view the Glacier the next day. Again the weather was not kind and we ended up visiting the Wildlife Centre there, which was definitely better than the last one, even though they only had two kiwis on display in the enclosure. As kiwis are protected they generally hatch the eggs in one of these centres and keep them in as natural environment as possible, before releasing into the wild. Also saw tuatara (look like lizards) but the species has been around for 220 million years or more.



In the afternoon we took a walk to the Glacier, only a slight drizzle, but on the way back got absolutely drenched! Di had planned to do a helicopter trip the next morning but it was cancelled due to bad weather and was unlikely to take place any time that day, so we set off for Queenstown.

23 to 25 Nov 22 – Queenstown via Milford Sound to Bannockburn

Lovely drive to Queenstown from Franz Josef, with views of Bruce Bay and the enormous crashing waves, Ship Creek lookout and stopped at the Hard Antler at Haast for a venison burger, NZ is one of the largest deer farmers.

Drove pretty much down the length of Lake Wanaka, halfway down views of Lake Hawea and stopping at the bottom for the "tree in the lake" photo opportunity!



Cardrona was our next stop for a drink in the historic hotel with an ancient car out front.

Finally arrived into Queenstown, it snowed overnight so woke to fabulous views of the Mountains from our campsite.



Took a trip on the Skyline Gondola in the morning, lucky the rain held off for more fabulous views. Headed off in the afternoon for Milford Sound.

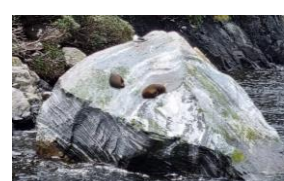
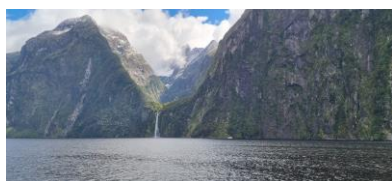
Can't think of enough superlatives to describe the road to the Sound, to describe the mountains, downs, mirror lakes, waterfalls galore and



Keas (Alpine parrots) just some of the sights to be had.



Unfortunately, Nigel was not well the next day so couldn't come on the boat trip on the sound. Again outstanding views and the chance to see the 3rd rarest penguin, Fiordland Crested Penguin, a couple of seals and lots of birdlife.



As Nigel was still unwell, I drove to our campsite that night at Cairnmuir in Bannockburn, over 5 hours drive but very interesting, once I got used to the 7m motorhome!

26 to 29 Nov 22 – Lake Tekapo to Christchurch

Still driving the van, left Bannockburn through the Lindis Valley with grasslands and lots of lupins. Stopped for lunch at Twizel, really quaint town with some fab shops including a hardware shop with just about everything you can imagine.

Set off and not long after went around a bend in the road and was met by the stunning aquamarine waters of Lake Pukaki, the colour being a result of fine silt particles in this glacier lake. Our stop for the next 2 nights was Lake Tekapo also a stunning colour and our site overlooked the lake.

Thankfully Nigel was feeling much better and took over the driving, which was fortunate as the next day headed up to Mount John Observatory for a view of the mountains and lake, again stunning views, pity about the mist on the mountains, but at least it wasn't raining. Headed off to the church of the Good Shepherd on the side of the Lake and a wander around the very small village.



On our way to Christchurch paid a visit to Gem Alpaca Farm and we were able to meet and feed these adorable creatures with such a soft coat and long eyelashes.

Said goodbye to our Motorhome today before we looked around Christchurch, which was devastated by two earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 and destroyed over 50% of the town centre buildings. Lots of restoration and rebuilding going on, but a long way to go. Took the vintage tram around the city, brilliant commentary from the drivers and conductors of the different trams and a great way to get around. Some iconic sites such as the mini stuck to the side of a building, which survived the quake, concrete filled containers protecting the facades of historic buildings, 3D painting on the side of a building giving the impression of crooked street, grey stone buildings similar to those in Scotland



Said goodbye to Di on the 29th as she is returning to the UK, after nearly two months travelling with

us, I am sure she will be pleased to see her kids and grandkids who are all growing up fast. Not sure any of us will be that keen on motorhome travel in the future, but we managed, apart from the rain at times, to see everything we planned and more.

30 Nov to 2 Dec 22 – Christchurch via Lewis Pass to Greymouth & Arthurs Pass to Methven

Picked up our hire car in Christchurch and set off for Greymouth over the Lewis Pass, some fantastic scenery on the way with a stop at Reefton. An old mining town



with an old section of mine in the visitor centre and some interesting information boards on the towns past. Obviously had to visit the local distillery and liberate a bottle of their citrus gin!



Greymouth is the end of the line for the Transalpine Express from Christchurch which we considered doing but the price was too much. The town has suffered from the lack of tourists, both from the train (which is even now only running at weekends) and west coast travellers and there is not much in the centre. Managed to find a piece of greenstone (NZ Jade) that I liked. Took a trip to Kumara, again another ex-mining town.



Set off back over Arthurs Pass towards the alpine town of Methven, lots of glacial rivers, pale aquamarine in colour and so clear. Otira Stagecoach Hotel was worth a stop with Gollum on the roof and Gandolph at the side with lots of other items on display.



Went over the Otira Gorge Road, a feat of engineering, replacing the road the miners dug for the goldrush in 1865. Arrived in Methven and not long after the heavens opened, definitely meant we stayed in the hotel restaurant for our evening meal.

3 to 7 Dec 22 – Methven to Invercargill

We had taken the majority of this road in the campervan with Di, but there are not too many choices in NZ for alternative routes. On our way, which took a few days, we made the following stops, plus all the scenic viewpoints along the route.

- Geraldine, a really quaint village and there was a farmers market on.
- Burkes Pass - fabulous vintage shop selling all sorts of signs, kitchenware, etc.
- Twizel - overnight where we had a fabulous Indian meal
- Mount Cook & Lake Pukaki - revisit but went the 55km to the visitor centre, fabulous views of the lake (which is nearly twice the size it was due to the dam)



- Transport & Toy Museum at Wanaka - really well laid out museum with lots of unusual aircraft, including Jet Provost Mark 5, which was at Cranwell when Nigel was there so he would probably have refuelled it at one time.
- Cardrona - stayed at the iconic hotel there with a stop to view the "bra wall" nearby in support of a Breast Cancer Charity



- Arrowtown - a renovated mining town from the late 1800s including a Chinese Settlement which has been partially restored. The town is full of very expensive shops, seems to be a day trip for those from Queenstown and surrounding area.
- Queenstown - took the "Million Dollar Cruise" around a section of the lake which has lots of expensive properties and a golf course



- Kingston - where a steam train and line has been restored and operated on certain days, unfortunately not when we were there.
- Mandeville - Nigel took a walk around the Croydon Aircraft Museum and I had a coffee in a cafe with a very expensive range of homeware and clothing!



Arrived in Invercargill and headed for Stirling Point and Bluff, not quite the most southerly point in NZ. Had a lazy day yesterday, some pampering & shopping for me and the Bill Richardson Transport Museum for Nigel.



8 to 9 Dec 22 – The Catlins to Dunedin

Fabulous drive from Invercargill through Catlins National Park with a few stops on the way for the views including Waipapa Point Lighthouse, Curio Bay (site of fossilised Jurassic era trees and the odd sealion), Nugget Point (to see sealions, but none visible), Kaka Point and into Dunedin centre.



Booked an evening tour to see Albatross and Little Blue Penguins, who come onto the beach at the end of the Otago Peninsula near dusk. Had to be well wrapped up but was worth it. Saw lots of Albatross flying around, gulls with their chicks before a talk about the Maori history and wildlife before heading down to the viewing platform. A couple of sealions on the beach (who eat penguins but decided not to, thankfully) who both went out to sea later. The penguins started coming in groups from the sea, before heading up the beach towards the platform area, where a lot of their burrows were, along with a few of the younger penguins who were not quite able to go to sea as yet.



Incredible sight and there must have been a few hundred of them, this species is not endangered but the Yellow Eyed Penguin which is on the other side of the peninsula is very rare.



Next day in Dunedin we visited Larnach Castle (originally the only castle in NZ) with fabulous gardens. Took a stroll around nearby Glenfalloch Gardens before the rain started. Central Dunedin buildings look very much like those in Edinburgh, including a piece of rock from there on the top of Signal Hill. Baldwin Street

the steepest residential street in the World lives up to its name, but restrictions on parking etc, due to disruption to the residents, meant we couldn't drive up the road, completely understandable.



10 to 12 Dec 22 – Dunedin to Christchurch



On the way we stopped off at Moeraki Boulder Beach where the rocks are spherical and no one really knows why, fabulous beach and even managed a paddle in the sea.



Oamuru was our next stop with a look round the Steampunk HQ, containing some very weird artwork, made out of metal, etc but well worth a look. Lots of arts and craft shops in the Victorian Precinct nearby, including steampunk clothing and accessories, managed not to buy lots of fab artwork! Lunch with a view of the ocean nearby.



Spent the night in Timaru before heading off to Akaroa, a French influenced town on a peninsula to the east of Christchurch. Lovely twisty and winding roads to get there and nice walk around and late lunch before heading to Christchurch.



Dropped off the car and headed to the Antarctica Centre for an entertaining morning which included a ride in a Hagglund, 4D cinema about Antarctica which included moving chairs, spraying with water, wind and snow fall! Gave the snow experience a miss, not keen on wind chill factor of -20, but loved meeting the huskies and seeing the blue penguins. One fact I hadn't realised is if the two poles ice melts, due to global warming this could increase the sea level by 60 metres!!



Finished off the day with seeing Black Adam at the cinema.

13 to 18 Dec – Kaikoura

Took the bus from Christchurch to Kaikoura, a really scenic 3 hour drive. Booked into a motel not far from the centre but hadn't realised the short distance was up a steep hill!!

Kaikōura is famous for sperm whales in the bay area due to abundance of nutrients and krill, lots of other whales inc blue, humpback, minkie and baleen visit on their migrations. Wildlife in the area includes dusky and hector dolphins, fur seals, albatross, cormorants (shags), crayfish and paua (abalone).

The day we had booked our whale watch was definitely not the best, with lots of rain and bitterly cold. A sperm whale was spotted after about 30 mins, when they are on the surface you can only see a bit of its head and middle back.

The whale was 'holy moley' (<https://whalewatch.co.nz/.../holy-molly-returns-for-summer/>) who continues to return to the area. To get that bit nearer we had a hair-raising ride, holding on for dear life at the front of the boat, the kids loved it, not sure my knees liked the bouncing up and down



Once we were closer, watched for a while as he hung around the surface to gain oxygen. Fabulous view of his tail before he dived back down to continue his feeding. They can stay down for 45 mins or more, so on a trip only likely to see one or two.

After this our captain took us to a large pod, over 200, of dusky dolphins. We have never seen this many in one place, they raced in front of the boat, leaping out of the water and generally putting on a great show for us.



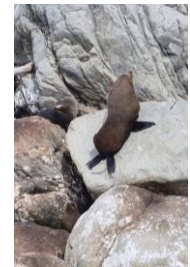
Took a walk down to the town on one of the sunnier days to the Motor Museum and Bernie's Diner. Lots of restored



American cars 50s and 60s cars and a few from the UK. Also on show was that years Trash Fashion Entries, all made out of rubbish and again brilliant and inventive. Had a milkshake in the replica 50s diner whilst Nigel finished viewing the cars.



Ventured out on a sightseeing tour of the area today with the local shuttle firm and Rick was our guide along with Tehaki (not exactly sure of the spelling). Excellent tour and saw the Kaikōura peninsula from the lookout, the old whaling pier, South Bay, and Oahu area where



there are loads of fur seals and cormorants. Lots of info on the area, especially the devastating earthquake in 2016, which cut the town off for a few months and destroyed the road to Picton in the North, which took one year, one month and one day to be reopened.

19 Dec 22 to 3 Jan 23

Scenic bus trip from Kaikoura to Picton, along the road that was renewed after the earthquake. Picton is a small ferry port connecting to Wellington on the North Island. Collected our hire car and checked in to our motel, just off the High Street.

We had booked a mail boat cruise of the Marlborough Sounds the next morning, but it was cancelled the evening before and too late to organise another trip. Nigel was pleased though as it meant he had a much longer time at the Omaka Air Museum, who had a WW1 and WW11 exhibitions, both of which he thought were excellent. Peter Jackson (Lord of the Rings Director) helped build the WW1 collection and his team helped display the aircraft. Glad we did this instead of the boat, as the weather not that brilliant.



Havelock was our next stop, famous for Green Lipped Mussels, definitely not something we both like. Very small town but managed to get a meal in the Captains Daughter restaurant, but last serving time was 7.30pm!



Took the road to the French Pass, through fabulous scenery, at points overlooking the Sounds. Decided as the last 15kms was unsealed road, with a chance of a puncture, no telephone signal and a few road slippages, that we would turn around, with 10kms to go,

at the Windy Trees Lookout point.



Carried on to Nelson, which is much bigger than we imagined. Met up with Katie, as Tee is now working in Auckland having been successful in becoming Head Chef at the Sugar Club in the Sky Tower. Unloaded our slightly reduced luggage (still working on that) and looking forward to spending nearly two weeks here with Katie.



Katie has organised loads of things for us to do. Our first day (22nd) was a trip to several wineries for tastings and lunch at the Moutere Inn, the oldest Inn in New Zealand. Loved Flaxmore wines the most but also Neudorf, Moutere and Gravity, where we sat outside with fabulous views of the vineyards. Obviously purchased a bottle or two!

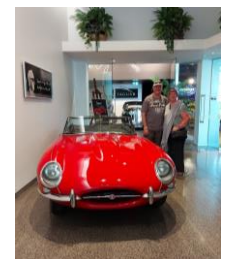
Finished off the evening at the local night markets, was too full for a meal, there was loads of choice, but did take home some fabulous cherries (which had a very short life) and nectarines.

Pic's Peanut Butter factory was our next port of call the following day, fascinating and a hit with us all, Nigel may even use peanut butter instead of marmalade on his toast. Seifried Wineries for our lunch and a tasting after. Visit to Hoglund Glass Blowing, some stunning pieces, could have bought loads but settled on some penguins, to remind us of New Zealand.



Picked up some local cheeses at The Junction and a final stop at the Souvenir Shop for a couple of bits and pieces. Katie is doing a few evenings at the Brick Eatery before moving to join Tee in Auckland, so went across for a glass or two of wine later in the evening. Can't thank Katie enough for all the organising.

Nelson Car Museum had an absolutely fantastic selection of cars, extremely well laid out, even a 'Cat Corner' devoted to Jaguars. Then had a quiet Xmas Eve as Katie was working.



Started Xmas Day with a dip in the pool, think it was the first time for me. Lunch was at the Brick Eatery, as Shaun the owner had kindly invited Katie and ourselves to join family and friends. Fabulous meal starting with lots of appetisers, then onto



Beef Wellington, Snapper and King fish (caught by Shaun's Dad, Kev), roast potatoes and fresh veg. To finish a selection of desserts brought by Diana, George & Joshua. All accompanied by lots of champagne and wine. Finally walked back to Katie's, loads of stars in the sky, at

1am. Another first of a 12 hour lunch!!





Went off to Rotoiti Lake for a lunchtime picnic by the lake, saw the eels under the pier, was a very hot day so didn't stay long after lunch, as not much shade. Popped in the Classic Boat Museum before returning back to Nelson. Evening meal was the traditional leftovers.



Mapua Bay for lunch at the Apple Shed, lovely restaurant on the wharf with views of Rabbit Island. Took a walk around the art and craft shops and finished with a wine tasting at Rimu, lovely tree arrangement with wine glasses all duly marked up, couldn't resist a bottle of Sophies Kisses, a lovely rose wine by Brightwater. Called in at Rare Creations a workshop selling traditional and unusual Creations generally made of wood. As the weather looked to be holding we took the road to Rabbit Island for a walk down the beach.



Next day was a picnic at Cable Bay, gorgeous setting although a rocky beach. Got a little sunburnt before heading back for a dip in the pool. Eddyline Brewery and pizzeria for the evening, had a taster flight of 6 beers plus pizza. Loved the citrus two I choose and Nigel particularly liked the

Kaiteri Gold Lager.



Abel Tasman National Park



Took an overnight trip to the Abel Tasman National Park and stayed in Takaka so we could do as much as we could of the park. Our first views were from one of the water taxis from Marahua. Another first in that you board the boat whilst it is attached to a tractor & trailer at the taxi offices and then drive to the beach where it is launched into the sea from the trailer by reversing into to sea! We even had a kayak on board for a

couple of passengers.

The Split Apple Rock was our first view, a piece of granite rock that has split to give it it's name. Then off to the island with a seal colony. A number of the male fur seals were about but the females have recently had or about to have their pups so were further into the undergrowth. Dropped off passengers in Anchorage Bay which is next to Torrent Bay, both fabulous sandy beaches and even saw a stingray. People either spend the day on the beach or took one of the many walks and stopped overnight in the huts within the park. Picking up another water taxi or walking to be collected at another point.



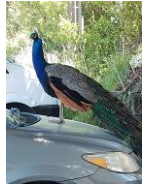
Lots of land slips on the coastline as they had 32 inches of rain over 3 days earlier in the year which caused the damage. Dropped off more people at Awaroa Bay before getting to our final stop at Totaranui, where we had a short break on the beach before the return trip.



We then drove over Takaka Hill, NZ's longest hill, rising 791 metres above sea level, the road is very steep and windy, the hill was also used as a film location for Lord of the Rings. Our B&B in Takaka was really great with lots of tips on what to do from Mark, the owner who was originally from Essex.



Next day we headed for Wharariki Beach, the last 5km of the road was unsealed, so car now a very dusty specimen. This was supposedly a flat 20 min walk, well nothing flat about it and the soft sand on the final hill to get on the beach was a real struggle, but we made it. The tide was out so a further walk to the sea over more soft sand to view the arched rocks and fur seals.



On our return had an ice lolly in the cafe in the car park, which had a resident peacock, peahen and chicks. The peacock took a fancy to one of the cars and decided he liked standing on the bonnet!



Next stop was a view of Cape Farewell Spit a nature reserve for many bird species. On our way back to Takaka the tide had come in on Golden Bay and gave some fabulous views of the ocean. Lots of horse trekking in the area and saw a group on the side of one of the small rivers.

Te Waikoropupu Springs was our next stop, the largest freshwater springs in NZ and supposedly contain some of the clearest water ever measured. Nice short walk through the forest, bordered by babbling brooks and gorgeous tree ferns. Even saw the largest species of whitebait in the crystal clear water.



Took a drive along the coast to Tata Beach driving through the rocks on the way, stopped for a coffee in Takaka before heading back over the hill to Nelson. Fabulous trip in glorious sunshine, possibly a little too hot at 29 first day and 24 on second day, but not complaining as we had hoped for better weather.

Our last few days in Nelson, on New Year's Eve we wandered around the Suter Art Gallery. Had brunch first in the cafe served by a characterful lady, who made our day. Varied items on display, particularly liked the John Gully watercolours.

Sunbathed by the pool in the late afternoon, drinks and a snack with a family we met from South Africa who have been in NZ for 5 years, then off to Urban Eatery for evening snacks and drinks in the centre of town. Decided to watch the fireworks at midnight from the house and also had the Auckland fireworks going off via the laptop. A lovely way to bring in 2023.



Lunch at the Boat Shed for New Year's Day, a glass of bubbles and a fabulous meal to toast 2023. The Founders Heritage Park was our walk after lunch, a well set out museum with lots of old restored and replica buildings with loads of information about the history of Nelson.

Took a walk to the Honest Lawyer in the evening for a drink and snack as it was all we could manage to eat.



On our last day in Nelson on Mon, we headed into town for a visit to the Provincial Museum, again lots of good information and displays, they also had a brilliant display of automaton which is touring from the UK. Took a walk to the cathedral before heading back.



Arranged an Indian takeaway (well Katie did!) in the evening at the restaurant (which is closed until Friday) as a thank you to Shaun, Kev and Pam for their hospitality during our holiday with Katie.

We have had a fabulous time visiting Katie and can't say enough for all the work she put in organising all our various sightseeing and meals. We will be seeing Katie and Tee in Auckland in a week or so.

3 to 4 Jan 23 – Wellington



Set off for the ferry at Picton, where we dropped off the hire car and had a quick visit to the Edwin Fox museum. At the museum is the remains of Hull of the Edwin Fox which is the only surviving convict ship of its type. Fascinating place and well worth the visit before we got on the ferry.

Our friends Lis and Paul met us at Wellington and we had a lovely evening eating fish and chips on their balcony overlooking Titahi Bay.

Lis and Paul kindly took us to Zealandia, a wildlife ecosanctuary in Wellington, which is completely surrounded by a fence, to keep out the pests that can kill such as cats, mice, rats and stoats. Saw a number of birds including



Tui, Kaka, North Island Robin, Saddleback and Cormorants (shags as they call them here) most of which were too quick for me to take a photo! Also saw some Tuatara, a living fossil, basking in the sunlight.



Gorgeous setting in an old quarry complete with a lake.

Lis and Paul dropped us off so we could pick up our hire car.

4 to 7 Jan 23 – Wellington to Rotorua via the Forgotten World Highway

We headed for Hawera, our overnight stop before setting off on the Forgotten World Highway to Taumarunui. On the way to the highway we had hoped for a good view of Mount Taranaki, however, the weather decided otherwise and it was surrounded by clouds! The highway winds its way through stunning countryside, up and down the hills, with good viewpoints and through the Makah and Moki Tunnels. Halfway is a small Republic called Republic of Whangamomona, which declared itself independent of NZ and voted a goat as its president, you can have your passport stamped for a small fee.



The next section is on unsealed road, through Tangarakau Gorge, lush forest and very Jurassic Park like. Stopped off near the end of the highway at Lauren's Lavender Farm, fabulous setting for our coffee stop



with a view. Overnight in Taumarunui before setting off for Rotorua.



On the way visited the Lava Glass Blowing gallery, some fabulous pieces but resisted a purchase. Next stop was the Aratiatia Dam to watch the water release, which happens 3 or 4 times daily. Most of the energy in NZ is generated by hydro electric, they have an awful lot of water!

Got to Rotorua in the late afternoon in the rain, lots of flooding and landslips on the Coromandel, our next destination. The weather didn't improve the next day so our plan to go on a lake cruise and go on a cable car got shelved and we decided on a cinema trip to see Operation Fortune, a Guy Ritchie film with Jason Statham and Hugh Grant, very entertaining, followed by a meal in the local Irish Pub!

8 to 12 Jan 23 – Coromandel to Bay of Islands

Left Rotorua and although the sun decided to make an appearance, the clouds didn't clear enough to warrant a trip up the gondola. However we did manage a visit to the Government Gardens before we left, this is where the museum is, but it has been closed for renovation for 6 years and nothing much appears to be happening.

Took a leisurely drive to Thames at the bottom end of the Coromandel and managed to catch the sunset from the beach near our motel, but it was very cloudy.



Next day took a drive around the peninsula, stopping off for the various sights along the way.



However a storm was brewing off the coast and it started to rain as we got to the east coast, where 6 metre waves were predicted later. We decided against a water taxi to Cathedral Cove and Hot Water Beach and only managed to get back before



the torrential rain started and it didn't stop all night.

We had pondered about changing our plans to go to the Bay of Islands but the weather outlook appeared to be better there than the alternatives.

Set off next day, in the rain towards Paihia in the Bay of Islands, luckily for us Google suggested an alternative route due to hold ups which we took. Although this was 18km on unsealed road, with the odd fallen tree, we got back on the main highway, only to be told by the police that there had been 3 landslips on our original route which they were hoping to clear by the evening. Arrived into Paihia a couple of hours later than expected though.



Boat day for us, firstly a ferry to Russell Town, 15 mins each way. Russell is one of the oldest towns in NZ and was originally the Hell Hole of North Island. In the afternoon we took a catamaran trip around the bay and up to the hole in the rock.



Unfortunately, due to the weather we could not go through the rock as it was too dangerous. Completely understandable as we could barely stand, when the boat had stopped, due to the swell!



On our final day we visited the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, where the original Treaty between the Maori and British Settlers was signed in 1840. Fabulous place with two museums, guided tour cultural experience and the largest waka (war canoe) built (it weighed 6 tonnes dry and 12 tonnes when wet and ready to sail - it is also longer than Captain Cooks Endeavour! Returned to Auckland with a stop at Wellingford, managed to get my haircut and the laundry done!



13 to 14 Jan 23 – Cruise to South Pacific Islands



Met up with Katie who kindly collected us after dropping off our hire car. Headed off to MOTAT and had a wander around the various exhibits, one of the best was one on sustainability and recycling and then got a vintage tram to the aviation hall. It was getting late but we had a walk around the War Museum, stunning building in parkland.



In the evening we met up with Katie and had drinks/snacks in the Sugar Club at the top of the Sky Tower, fabulous views. Tee was able to join us later and it was lovely to finally meet up with him since our arrival in New Zealand, as he had started on his new job in Auckland in Nov and has recently been promoted for which many congratulations.

Had a little wander around Sky City this morning before Katie came to collect us and took us and the luggage to the Eclipse. Didn't take too long to get onboard and find our cabin, which is an ocean view at the front of the ship (7006) with views of the helipad.



17 to 18 Jan 23 – Lautoka & Suva, Fiji

Set sail for two days to Fiji, our first port of call was Lauktoka where there were very few tours available, as in all the ports generally due to resources and lack of staff. In Lautoka and Suva we decided to take a walk around the two ports. Most people who come to Fiji on a beach holiday land at Nadi Airport for the Coral Coast or one of the many resorts on the islands, which is about an hours drive.



Everyone was really friendly and we treated ourselves to a coffee in the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva, this is where the Queen stayed and more recently Harry and Meghan!

20 Jan 23 – Apia, Samoa



In Samoa we had a fabulous time at the Cultural Centre, where we made coconut leaf plates, Nigel drank a welcome cup of the local brew, watched how they cooked food in the ground, wood carving, tattooing and finally a welcome show with fire dancing. The fire dance was incredible and to finish it all they all shook our hands. Only cost US\$10 for the two of us, so left a generous tip. Sailed that evening for American Samoa and crossed the International Dateline, so we got to do the 20 Jan again.



20 Jan 23 – Pago Pago American Samoa

American Samoa we had booked a local bus tour. Unfortunately, the bus broke down on its way up the mountain, no replacement buses so they repaired ours after an hour or so, but they weren't entirely sure it would be able to get up the mountain so in the end we returned to the ship via the market. When we set sail again, we lost the day we gained, so missed out on 21 Jan.



23 Jan 23 – Nuku A'lofa, Tonga

Tonga was gorgeous, but so hot. Again very little available on the tour front, so took a walk to see the Royal Palace, Tombs and a number of churches. This was the first visit by our ship the Celebrity Eclipse.



Met lots of people on board this part of the cruise including Paul & Marie from Melbourne and Sue & Pam from Shropshire who joined us for a number of the quizzes. Paul & Marie were leaving in Auckland and as always lovely to meet such nice people and you never know we may meet up again in the future

26 Jan to 7 Feb 23 – Auckland to Sydney Cruise

Lovely to meet up again with Katie and Tee in Auckland for brunch, after which we did a little shopping before getting back onboard. As we were "back to back" guests we had to do a covid test and thankfully we were negative, though a few tested positive who have to isolate for 7 days! We left Auckland at the right time as that night they had 10 inches of rainfall, causing flooding and chaos at the airport, so much so a state of emergency was announced.

27 Jan 23 – Tauranga

Our first port was Tauranga but we didn't leave the ship as it was non-stop torrential rain and the main attractions were Rotorua and Hobbiton which we had already seen.

28 Jan 23 – Napier



In Napier, although still raining it was not quite as heavy so took a trip into the town. Which is full of art deco buildings as it was devastated by an earthquake in 1931 and everything was rebuilt at the same time.



Took a walk around the museum and earthquake exhibition, some fascinating stories from survivors and lots of photos and items from the time.

29 Jan 23 – Picton



At Picton we had arranged to join four others on a wine tour, with someone else driving! Visited Johanneshof, Rock Ferry, Cloudy Bay and finally Saint Claire where we had a late lunch. Some really lovely wines, most of which were small organic winemakers. Also stopped at Makana Chocolate, obviously a purchase was necessary!



30 Jan 23 – Wellington

In Wellington, had pre-booked the Weta Workshop where they make costumes and props for films like Lord of the Rings, Dune, Chappie, Spiderman, Lara Croft and many others. It was a fascinating tour seeing how things were made and the detail involved. Dad would have been fascinated by the CNC milling machine, which was in action whilst we were there. We also did a tour of the new Thunderbirds Are Go where there are a number of 1/12 scale models, again the detail was amazing.



Lis and Paul met us for lunch and took us to the Chocolate Fish Cafe on the coast which was an old Air Force Officers Quarters. Really nice fish sandwiches and of course we bought some chocolate fish! It was lovely to meet up with them both again, we were all on the Queen Elizabeth last year.



Spent our last hour or so in the Te Papa Museum and looked around the Gallipoli Exhibition, in which there are a number of statues of people, 2 or 3 times life-size, who were killed in the war (all made at Weta Workshop), horrendous War with so many killed on both sides. The Nature exhibition was also good, although I don't like stuffed animals, I finally got to see the five different types of kiwi along with many other birds and animals only found in New Zealand. Excellent information on the volcanoes and earthquakes that feature largely in NZ history.



31 Jan 23 – Christchurch



We had been to Christchurch previously and this time wanted to go up on the Cable Car, as you know Nigel likes this type of thing. Fabulous views from the top and thankfully a clear day.



2 Feb 23 – Dunedin



Dunedin was our next stop and this time we visited the informative Settlers Museum and then a walk around the centre that reminds you so much of Edinburgh.

3 Feb 23 – Dusky, Doubtful & Milford Sounds (cruising by)



We sailed into three of the Fjords in NZ. Dusky Sound which we thought we wouldn't see as the weather was so bad, but as we entered it cleared and we even saw a large pod of resident bottle nosed dolphins. Next was Doubtful Sound but the weather had closed in again and it was very foggy and overcast. Finally, Milford Sound, which Nigel missed on our previous visit as he wasn't very well.



Didn't bode well as the weather again wasn't brilliant but as we got further in the rain stopped and the clouds lifted and we had brilliant views of the Sound with its many waterfalls, one of which had a rainbow in the spray. Didn't see any penguins or even the odd seal this time though!



4 Feb 23 – At Sea to Sydney

Now on our way to Sydney, so it's farewell to New Zealand after 12 fabulous weeks. We have enjoyed every minute, despite the weather and would highly recommend a visit.



We had an overnight on the ship in Sydney before disembarking. We took the ferry to Manly and had a walk down the beach, sat and admired the view, did a little shopping before heading back to the ship. It was the first real sunny day at 27 degrees we have had for a while.



We had a fabulous cruise despite the weather. Our ocean view cabin was brilliant, which looked forward to the helipad, very spacious and our home for 24 days.



Captain Leo and his team were around and about and so friendly and approachable. All of the staff were so friendly it was one of the best cruises we have been on. The Captain and Kelly, the Cruise Director, were there to wish us goodbye as we left the ship. Good entertainment and activities, Liars Club being a highlight, lots of guest artists and music around the ship. Not forgetting the quizzes, which we won just the odd one.



We will be back on the ship in December for our South America trip and really looking forward to it.

7 to 9 Feb 23 – Sydney

Sydney for the second time and luckily for us Sandra and Michael (who live in Sydney and who we met on the Queen Mary 2 in Jan 20 when we first started our travels) kindly offered to be our tour guides for a couple of days. Started with a visit to the Botanical Gardens, where there is an excellent view of the Opera House with the Harbour Bridge in the background.



Lunch in the Art Gallery and then off to the Fish Market to pick up something for our evening meal. Never seen such a variety of fish and seafood and there were several shops within the market. Took their dog Stanley for a walk in Centennial Park, where the Federation of Australia was signed in 1901. Sandra made us an excellent meal of prawns, scallops and fish. We even agreed to try a fresh oyster, which although not to our taste was far better than the last one we remembered eating!



Next day we took a drive out to Bondi and Coogee Beaches, much preferred the latter, which had a memorial to those from Coogee who had died in the Bali Bombing. Next was La Perouse Museum housed in the historic Cable Station which once had the only link to the rest of the world. La Perouse was a French explorer who went missing in 1788 and the museum tells his story. Also in the area is Bare Island an old military outpost. From here there is a view of Botany Bay, where Captain Cook landed in 1770. Lunch at the Boat Shed, really nice fish and chips although far too much!



Can't thank Sandra and Michael enough for their hospitality.

10 to 18 Feb 23 – Perth



Flew to Perth to stay with friends Debs and Ali who we also met onboard the Queen Mary 2 in Jan 20. In a world full of coincidences, Barbara who we also met on the Queen Mary 2, arrived into Perth on the same day as we did! We met up the next day for Brunch at the Boat Shed in South Perth and then took a cruise down the Swan River to Fremantle, where we had fish and chips at Cicerellos, where Diane, Debs sister joined us. They had a "Seniors Special" which included fish & chips, drink and an ice cream!



The next day we waved goodbye to Barbara as she boarded the Indian Pacific train to Sydney. After which we had coffee by the water (which had jellyfish in) not far from the Optus Stadium.

Back to Fremantle the next day and a visit to the prison, which only closed in 1996. The conditions were horrendous and they were still using toilet buckets until then. Looked around the Roundhouse which was also a prison when it was built, before the number of prisoners meant they needed a bigger prison!



Mandurah was our next day out, taking the train down to this coastal town, commonly referred to as the Venice of Western Australia. Took a boat trip around the waterways, to see the fabulous waterfront houses and spotting the bottlenose dolphins. Saw the odd one or two and in the



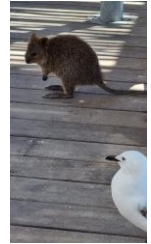
distance a small pod chasing fish near the bank, along with the odd pelican or two. Lovely day out on the train.



Our next day started off with Number 1 Pumphouse and Dam, which was not far from where we are staying in Kalamunda. Had a walk across the dam, where there were divers in the reservoir removing rubbish thrown in carelessly. Headed into Perth on the train and made use of a couple of the free CAT bus routes to see some of the sights. Finished the day with meeting Debs at the rooftop bar at the Double Tree Hilton in the harbour.



One of the highlights was our trip to Rottnest Island and the fabulous beaches, bus tour with Ted as our guide and not forgetting the unique Quokkas, which were all around the island, a unique species only found on Rottnest! Brilliant day with Debs and Ali.



Visit to King's Park and the Botanical Gardens and another unbelievable meet up with Mike and Margaret Kewley, who were in Perth visiting their son, can't



believe we met up halfway around the world and live not far from us in the UK!



Finished our time with Debs and Ali at the King and I, Thai restaurant in Guildford. They have been fabulous hosts and can't thank them enough for putting us up and showing us around Perth.

Flew back to Sydney and just missed the horrific storm which caused huge damage and left lots of homes without power.

19 to 20 Feb 23 - Sydney

Typical this weekend in Sydney there were track repairs on the train line near our hotel, so replacement buses and a change to light rail to get our ferry to Parramatta. Next issue was that Parramatta Jetty was being refurbished so we got off the ferry at the Sydney Olympic Park before heading back to Cockatoo Island, which was a former penal colony, with a power station on site before it gained mainland power in the 1950s. Excellent view of the Harbour Bridge on our return to Circular Quay and back to our hotel.



Flew to Bangkok and said goodbye to Australia and New Zealand and the end of our Down Under adventure and what an adventure it was.

Irene & Nigel
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