

## WONDER DOWN UNDER-New Zealand & Australia 2010

We had discussed taking a cruise to New Zealand and Australia for some time. Kathy had never been to either place, and this seemed like the time to do it. I am looking forward to feeling her sense of wonder as we tour both countries.



We decided on a Princess ship which offered many amenities that the Paul Gauguin did not have, as well as a very attractive price for a mini suite. The problem with Princess, as my sister Doris and I had discussed, was they offer the cabins at an attractive price, but then get you other places. When we got our statement, we discovered that they were charging over \$1900 each for airfare. My sister and brother-in-law always book their air independently, so we did some research. After checking a number of sites, we discovered that Air Tahiti Nui had the most attractive fares-some \$400 per person less than Princess.

The only problem was that the airline did not fly to the destination every day, so we would have to lay over in Tahiti both ways. What a shame!!!! The only thing better than being in Tahiti twice is to be there 4 times! We would have at least a full day on the return to Los Angeles, so we might take one of the inter-island ferries to Moorea for the day.

I am looking forward to going on this new Princess ship. It is quite a bit larger than the 2 older ones I was on many years ago. The ship will offer many more amenities than many of the smaller ships I had been on. One thing I wanted to do in Sydney was to climb the harbor bridge. They offer climbs at different times of day, but I figured the early morning one would be the best, as it would be cool. We will be dressed in coveralls that match the bridge color, to avoid attracting attention of the motorists below.

Well, it turned out the dawn climb was \$100 more than the day one, so I passed and booked the regular tour. I also went on line and made all our hotel reservations. One advantage of being there before was that I knew the layout of both cities, and selected hotels in the best location for our travels. Also, Gray Line has a great series of tours in both cities, and we checked them on line to see which ones we wanted.

### TAHITI

Our flight from LA to Tahiti was uneventful, and we got to our hotel around 10 PM. Our flight the next morning left at 8:30 AM, but it was worth the stopover to sleep, shower and freshen up. Since the airport in Tahiti is small, we saw no reason to get there 3 hours ahead of our flight. We checked in about an hour before the flight and there was no line at check in or security!

### AUCKLAND

The flight to Auckland was uneventful, and we took a taxi to our hotel. Unfortunately there was some construction that held us up and ran up the meter. Our hotel was close to the harbor, and we had a nice view from our hotel room.



We just wandered around the local area to unwind and recover from our flight. The next day we took an all day tour of Auckland.

Our first stop was at the War Memorial museum, and they had a fantastic display of Maori items including a replica of a meeting house and a large canoe.



There was also an exhibit of Maori carving and a replica of one of the sailing canoes.





The museum also commemorated the many different wars the New Zealanders fought in, and there was a list of all that had lost their lives in these battles.

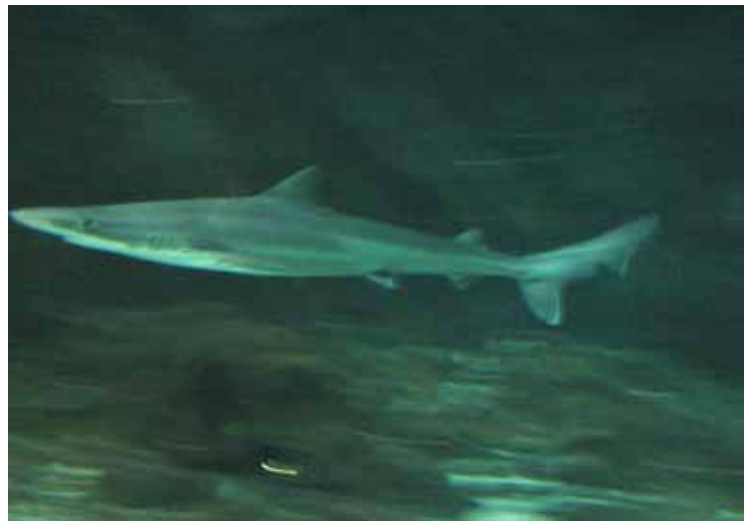
There was also a captured Japanese Zero and a Supermarine Spitfire.



Following the visit to the museum, we were taken to the harbor to visit a place called Underwater World. Part of it is a large aquarium with a tube running through it so you can walk under the water. First, we went on a simulated snow cat ride through the penguin exhibit. We could see the penguins swimming underwater, and then on land.



From there we went into the large tube to see the aquarium. It was strange being able to look up at fish swimming around.





After the tour through the aquarium, we were taken to the ferry landing for a harbor tour. The Auckland harbor is very sheltered, and there are a huge number of sailboats that use it. In fact, Auckland's nickname is "City of Sails". I got pictures of an unusual sailboat with a long bowsprit. It is used to deploy a huge balloon spinnaker. We also saw to of the America's cup boats going out to race. People can either just watch, or be involved in the actual handling of the boat and sails.



As we were going under the Auckland harbor bridge, we saw someone bungee jumping! On the first bounce they actually touched the water!





That was sort of the capper for our harbor tour. We headed back to the hotel, which was only a block from the harbor to plan our last day in Auckland.

Our hotel was next to the train station, so we figured we could see more of the countryside that way. Upon checking, we discovered that 2 of the 3 lines were shut down for improvements to the signals, so that left only the remaining line.

We spoke to some people in the station, and they recommended we go to Sylvia Park, which featured the largest shopping mall in New Zealand. The train ride was pleasant, and gave us a chance to look at some of the countryside. The mall was just a block away from the train station, and we wandered around looking in the various shops.

Kathy had gotten a haircut before our trip, but she decided it was not short enough. It turned out there was a salon in the mall, and she got her hair cut there. When she was done, she told me that part of the haircut was also a great scalp massage, which she enjoyed.

Well, shopping can work up an appetite, so we found a great pub in the food court. It was very crowded, and we shared a table with two local men. One of them had gotten a bad infection, and instead of keeping him in the hospital, they sent him home with a catheter in his arm, and hypodermics full of antibiotics he had to administer to himself 4 times a day!

We ordered local oysters and a great pizza. The fellows insisted on taking a picture of us enjoying the local food.

After lunch, we wandered around the rest of the mall, and then headed back to the train station. It may have been the largest mall in New Zealand, but was about the size of a local Mall in Ventura, which has a population of about 120,000.

One of the things we noticed was the high prices on everything, even if the New Zealand dollar was worth 75 cents US.

On our last night in Auckland, we went to a local restaurant and both enjoyed a bowl of New Zealand green-lipped mussels.

Since we could not board our ship until afternoon, we found a small deli across the street from the hotel and had a nice lunch.

We took a taxi to the ship, which was docked about 5 blocks from our hotel, and checked in. We discovered that in selecting our cabin, we picked one fairly far aft. The ship is about 1000 feet long, and the showroom and a lot of the services were far forward! The only good part was that we were close to the restaurants and the Skyview lounge on the top deck.

Our mini suite was very comfortable, and had a lot of drawer and closet space. Our travel agent had sent a beautiful bouquet of flowers, they lasted almost the entire cruise.

We sat out on our veranda to watch the sunset over the water, and were quite surprised to see a rare event called a "green flash"! Green flashes are actually a group of optical phenomena that occur shortly after sunset or before sunrise, when a green spot is visible, usually for no more than a second or two, above the sun, or a green ray shoots up from the sunset point. The reason for a green flash lies in refraction of light (as in a prism) in the atmosphere.

It happened so quickly that I was not able to get a photo of it, but I have downloaded a picture from the internet that clearly shows the spot.



## TAURANGA

Our first port of call was Tauranga, and we were taken to Rotorua for the day. Our first stop was at the Agrodome where we learned about New Zealand's important sheep industry in an approximately 60-minute program that featured sheep dogs in action, a sheep shearing demonstration and displayed featuring 19 breeds of sheep.

The sheep were released one at a time up to raised platforms that had the names of each breed. To encourage the sheep, there was a bowl of some sort of sheep feed at each position.

The narrator then proceeded to demonstrate sheep shearing. He said a good shearer could do 300 sheep a day, but the strain of bending all that time limited their careers.

He then had some lambs come out, and people were allowed to feed them.



The narrator then brought out a milk cow, and asked for a volunteer to milk it. Kathy said she had milked one once, so he called her on it and had her come up on the stage. She did a great job, and was given a certificate of "Udderance"





We then had lunch at a local hotel, and then took in a Maori concert. We watched intricate hand games used to train young warriors; listened for songs that tell a story or deliver a message - poi dances suggest a flight of birds and the haka is a war dance designed to frighten an enemy. The New Zealand All Black rugby team uses the haka before every game. To see the haka in action, you can go to [YOUTUBE](#) and search on "haka".



After lunch and the show, we visited the Te Puia Thermal Reserve. This thermal valley with pools of boiling mud, spouting geysers, silica terraces and steam vents are among the wonders of this reserve. Our Maori guide shared the local lore and legends of this homeland to the Tuhourangi sub-tribe. The reserve also features a re-creation of an early Maori village with one of their storage houses.



## CHRISTCHURCH

We boarded our bus, and saw some of the city sights on a narrated drive through Christchurch. We were then taken to the Waimakariri River. The river was rather low, based on the exposed river bottom, but there was definitely enough water to run the jet boats.

We were issued spray jackets and life vests ( The politically correct term is "personal floatation devices". I guess the lawyers were at work here) and boarded our jet boat.

Our jet boat was powered by a V8 engine and we ascended the river rapids on a thrilling cruise that navigated shallow water and narrow rocky gorges. Every so often, the driver signaled, and we would do 360-degree spins!



## DUNEDIN

Our first stop was at the Victorian Railway station in Dunedin, which was quite interesting. It is the starting point for the Taieri Gorge railway trip. I had taken it the last time I was here, and we decided to go out to the Otago Peninsula to see the wildlife instead.



On our way out of town, our guide pointed out a building on the hill with a ball on it. He said the ball would drop at exactly one PM so all the ships could set their clocks. He also said it was the only one in the world. If he had said the only one in the Southern Hemisphere, that would have been correct. Below on the left is the one in Dunedin, and on the right is the one at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England.





We explored the headlands of the Otago Peninsula on an eco-style tour that featured an 8-wheel-drive Argo vehicle. After a long and very bumpy ride, we came upon a sea lion rookery. There were a number of pups, and there was a small pool in which they were playing, sort of like a kiddy pool for sea lion pups. We also saw one pup nursing as his mother just lay there.



We then visited Penguin Beach at the tip of the Otago Peninsula and the only home of the world's rarest penguin, the "hoiho" or yellow-eyed penguin. Binoculars are provided at the viewing platform for an up-close look at the 45-60 nests. We did not see any penguins as they were all at sea feeding and do not come back until dusk.



We then toured Westpac Trust Aquarium and view its collection of sea horses, octopi, sharks and other denizens who make their home in the local waters.

## FJORDLAND

Our final call in New Zealand's South Island was in Fjordland National Park. The fjords were carved out by glaciers the same way the fjords in Norway were. We passed through Dusky Sound, around an island and then came out to the sea through Breaksea Sound. We then repeated the same process, entering Doubtful Sound and coming out through Thompson Sound. There were low clouds obscuring most of the higher terrain, which was a disappointment.

However, upon entering Milford Sound, the clouds cleared and the views were spectacular. There is one waterfall under which small ships can actually put their bows! The Southern Alps seen through the breaks in the mountains were absolutely beautiful!



There is one peak called Mitre Peak, as it resembles a bishop's mitre, but there was a persistent cloud on the top. There were also numerous water falls throughout the park.



#### TASMAN SEA

The Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand can be some of the roughest waters in the world. We had a two day transit, and the first day was calm, but on the second day the wind and waves kicked up. We had 50 mile per hour winds and 30 foot seas! To ease the pounding on the ship and passengers the captain slowed from 18 knots down to 4 knots.





## HOBART, TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

Our drive took us through Hobart's northern suburbs, over the Bridgewater Bridge to the wildlife park. At Bonorong Wildlife Conservation Centre, we met the Tasmanian devil and other picturesque natives including wombats, wallabies, kangaroos and koalas at this popular wildlife park. I got a great picture of a Tasmanian Devil yawning. I also got a shot of an Echidnas or spiny anteater.



Park rangers held and fed many of the animals allowing them to be touched and photographed. We were able to pet both a koala and a wombat



There were also kangaroos running around loose that you could hand feed. I got a surprise when I tried to get a picture of an emu and he got up close and personal with my camera!





We took a Day on the Bay with Dolphins excursion. We traveled to the Mornington Peninsula and enjoyed some free time to explore the charming seaside town of Sorrento. Our tour commenced with an introductory on-board snorkel demonstration, after which we traveled out into the sheltered shallows of Port Phillip Bay and cruised over to Chinaman's Hat. It is a local spot where the Australian Fur Seals waited to share their underwater world with us.



We swam with the seals for approximately 30 minutes and had the opportunity to take some close up photos of these beautiful animals.



From Chinaman's Hat, we cruised over to Popes Eye Marine Park for a look at the Australasian Gannets and the vast array of sea birds colonizing here at the Marine Park. We had the opportunity to snorkel around Victoria's oldest Marine Park to view the array of friendly colorful fish, and the occasional friendly stingray.





From there we cruised to Port Phillip Bay in search of the Bottle Nose Dolphins. When the dolphins were located, we donned our masks and snorkels and entered the water, swimming into their domain. We swam with the dolphins in small groups taking it in turns to experience this truly awesome experience - and one we will never forget! Kathy was the first one in to swim with the dolphins and this picture says it all! I also had the opportunity, but by the time it was my turn, they had swam away.



After we got dried off and changed out of our wetsuits. We were taken to a town for lunch. It was Australia Day (sort of like our July 4<sup>th</sup>) and people were out in droves. We were told we only had a half hour for lunch, so we looked for a place that was not too crowded. Kathy ordered a sandwich, and I saw a blackboard menu with "Box of shrimp and a beer". I figured that was like shrimp in a basket, with small fried shrimp. This is what I got:



Two dozen large shrimp with the heads and shells still on!! Since we were being rushed, I would have to shell one while still eating the previous shrimp. Needless to say, I was off shrimp for the rest of the trip.

## SYDNEY

We docked in Sydney early in the morning at the cruise ship terminal which was dwarfed by our ship. Since we could not check into our hotel until afternoon, we took an excursion to the Blue Mountains offered by the ship. Our luggage went with us and we would be dropped near our hotel after the tour. We first went on a short city tour to show us the Sydney Harbor Bridge and an amusement park called Luna Park.



From there we were taken to the former site of the Sydney Olympics. The cauldron that had the Olympic flame was turned into a fountain, and the main stadium is still used for concerts.



We were taken to the Scenic World Park which featured the steepest funicular in the world. We were told about the legend of the three sisters, which were 3 stone pillars, and there were sculptures outside the entrance of the 3 sisters and their father.





We first went to a scenic overlook, and the views were spectacular. The blue haze on the mountains is caused by droplets of water that also contain eucalyptus oil.



From the overlook, we could see the boardwalk at the bottom of the funicular and the tram that would take us back up to the top.



We then were loaded into the funicular, and at first it did not look that steep, but there was netting over the top which I assumed was to keep people from falling out. As we departed the platform, the cars went almost straight down! In the right hand picture, the tree at the left is growing straight up and you can see the angle it makes with the top of the car!





We got off at the bottom, and walked along the boardwalk looking at the sights, which included an old mine entrance and some Australian tree ferns that were 20 feet tall. Just about the time we reach the tram station, the heavens opened up with thunder, lightning, rain and hail! The tram was shut down for about 20 minutes until the storm abated in case there was a power failure and people would be stuck on the tram. From the Blue Mountains we were taken to Featherdale Animal Park, which was sort of like the one in Hobart, but much larger. We were greeted in the parking lot by one of the guides holding a joey, or baby kangaroo.



There were all manner of birds that were allowed to roam free in the park, and most were tame enough to be gently petted. One was a kookaburra, and the other was some sort of owl.



There were all sorts of other interesting birds there, both loose and in cages.





There were some cute koalas, including one sleeping with his chin tucked in the fork of a tree. The thing that surprised me was that there were penguins in the park, which must have been like the ones we did not see on the Otago Peninsula in New Zealand. They apparently did not need the cold conditions that other types did.



From the park we were taken to one of the hotels on the tour, and caught a taxi to our hotel. We were advised to book a room on the executive floors, and it was really great. As a perk, there was a hospitality room that featured breakfasts in the morning, and hors d'oeuvres and drinks in the evening. It was nice to sleep in a bed that was not moving, after being at sea for 12 days. The next morning I took off to do a climb of the Sydney Bridge. In 2006 Bridge Climb launched The Discovery Climb. It was a climbing adventure that took me right into the heart of the Sydney Harbor Bridge. The Discovery Climb was a 3 ½ hour Climb experience that journeyed to the top along the inner arch of the Bridge.

I got there early enough that I could go on a previous climb that only had a group of 7 Climbers. We were able to touch the raw steel and rivets and experience this amazing structure up close. We wound above the harbor on catwalks, scaled the steel heart of the bridge and emerged to a unique summit experience via a mammoth staircase between the two arches of the Bridge.

Along the way, one of Bridge Climb's professional Climb Leaders shared the Bridge's history. The summit is 134 meters (435 feet) above the water, where we were rewarded with amazing panoramic views of Sydney harbor. At the end of the Climb, we received a commemorative Climber Certificate and a complimentary group photograph.



After I got back to the hotel, we had lunch at a sidewalk café behind the hotel next to a small park. Along with the pigeons in the park were ibises like we saw at the animal park. They are apparently a pest and are Australia's answer to pigeons.

From the park we walked down to Circular Quay from which all the ferries and harbor tours departed. We saw that a ferry was about to leave for Manly, which was clear on the other side of the harbor. We rushed over to catch it, not realizing that they ran every 30 minutes!

It was a beautiful sunny day, and the ride was very pleasant. We got off the ferry, and saw a sidewalk café where we stopped to refresh ourselves. As usual, I had a glass of the local beer, and Kathy had a glass of wine. She commented on the small portion and the price, and I remembered an article I had read in the local paper. It seems that there is a 26% tax on wine in Australia, which means the money from almost every third glass goes to the government. In the US, the tax is something like 10 cents a bottle.

On the way back to Circular Quay, I took the obligatory bridge picture. As I looked, I saw a group of climbers going along the upper span, so I took a picture to show how small they were against the bridge structure.



The next day was a decompression day to get us ready for the long trip home. On my way to the bridge the previous day, I noticed a street fair going on with all kinds of food and merchandise at an area called The Rocks.

We walked there from the hotel, and there were musicians playing and all sorts of people wandering around. I also got a picture of the Opera House on the way.



We left the hotel the next morning and caught our flight from Sydney to Auckland. We had about an hour and a half between flights, and we were worried about making the connection. Since that leg was on Qantas and not



Air Tahiti Nui, we could not get our seats ahead of time. At the airport they assigned us seats in row 51, way at the back of the plane.

The flight was uneventful, and we arrived in Auckland on time, but they had trouble aligning the Jetway. We finally got off the plane and headed for our next gate. I still had about \$5 in New Zealand coins left, and as I passed one of the Duty Free stores I asked the clerk what I could buy with that amount. She laughed and said, "A chocolate bar", which I did.

Our flight to Tahiti was very pleasant, as the plane was half full, and I moved over so Kathy could have more room in the two seats.

## TAHITI

The particular plane we were on had a camera in the cockpit, and it was really great watching the approach to the airport at night. It almost felt like we were flying the plane!

We cleared customs in Tahiti and checked into the same hotel we stayed at on our way to New Zealand. We slept in the next morning, but as the day grew hotter, we noticed that our room temperature was at 79 degrees even though the air conditioner was set on maximum. We called the desk and asked someone to check it. We had a similar problem in Auckland, and there it turned out that the unit had been replaced, but one of the valves was turned off.

We went to the snack bar for lunch, and when we came back there was no change in temperature. I went down to the front desk and they asked if anyone had been there, and I told them we did not know, but the room was not being cooled. We were given a room across the hall which was definitely cooler, and we could watch the temperature drop.

Before we left, I took a picture of the beach at our hotel with the island of Moorea in the background, and Kathy suggested I take a picture of our last sunset in Tahiti.



We had a nice dinner in the restaurant, and set our alarm for 12:30 AM. Our flight left at 2 AM, and there was no sense getting there early and sitting in the non air conditioned terminal. Our hotel was only 10 minutes from the airport, and we were checked in with no waiting. As we went through security, the flight attendants had just shown up, so we knew we were there in plenty of time.

Our flight was not full, and I grabbed seats in the middle so we both had room to stretch out. We arrived around noon, and cleared customs and immigration quickly. On our way home our driver told us about the terrible rainstorms that happened while we were gone.

This was a fantastic trip, with Kathy swimming with the wild dolphins and me doing the Sydney Bridge Climb. We were both very happy with this Princess cruise ship. Our accommodations were great and there were a number of venues for both dining and entertainment.

Also, the cruise had a number of sea days where we could just relax and not have to "follow the yellow umbrella".

We are now home for 4 months to rest up for our next adventure. We will be taking a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam, then a Baltic cruise. That way we only have to do one set of Atlantic crossings.

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