

A Traveler Writes: New Zealand In Luxury and Style

I loved working with Joan to plan this incredibly special 40th anniversary trip for her and her husband Richard! She wanted luxury lodges, but was open to my suggestions about including a few places where she was more likely to mingle with the locals. She also wanted to do a few things they had never done before – like fly fishing! As I do with all clients, I asked about their hobbies and interests, and had great fun with this couple because he is in the wool yarn business! What better place to go than New Zealand, famed for having more sheep than people! Enjoy their ride.....

**Date: Thu, 19 Nov 2009
from Christchurch**

Well after 40 years I finally know how to make my husband happy...Take him to a yarn shop!!! I arranged with my travel agent to be taken to THE yarn store a special place just an hour outside of town - **Ashburton**. The shop was filled with lovely yarns and yarn accessories. It is owned by 2nd generation people and their main interest is spinning wheels. We got a personal tour of the factory by the owner – so I just sat back and watched Richard spin his yarn with this other fellow spinning his!

We are staying in a guest house. This is our first experience with this type of accommodation. I thought that since we didn't know any one in this country it might be a nice introduction, and a way to get to "know the natives." It has turned out to be great! **Hadleigh House** is a huge 100-year old "Arts and Crafts" style. The owners, Jon and Shirley Warring, are charming. He collects Porsches and teaches car racing and she is a retired business woman.



Last night we joined them and about 20 of their local guests at a cocktail party they hosted. The guests were all their local friends who also enjoy race cars as a hobby. This morning we took off with a **helicopter to Kaikoura** to go whale watching. We saw 2 sperm whales about 9 miles from shore, about 500 feet above the surface of the water. We could see the entire length of the whale which was more than 30 feet long! We watched as the whale came up for air and after 5 minutes or so dove straight down and disappeared.

We then flew to wine country to lunch in the garden of the **Pegasus Bay Winery** in Amberly. The gardens were amazing, the sun was shining and the sky was so clear. After lunch we walked through the gardens to our waiting helicopter to be whisked off back to town. The views of the countryside were spectacular....green rolling hills and flat lands, surrounded by snow covered mountain tops and the ocean -- a bit like Switzerland with the Italian country side and the coast of California -- and like no other place at all. From high up it looks like a collection of green mosaic tiles of different sizes and shades

outlined by darker bits of green that were trees that surrounded plots of land. The different shades were actually different crops or grasses. And if you looked real close you could see what looked like painted dots but were actually sheep and cattle! Decorating some of those green tiles were homesteads.

Our day ended with a walk through the town of Christ Church. It was lovely and clean and the air was fresh and crisp. Richard branded the day as an A+ !!! So far so good!

Date: Sat, 21 Nov 2009
Subject: Re Queenstown

We flew to **Queenstown** and were picked up at the airport by our guide Harvey for a **day of fly fishing!** Richard has always said he would love to learn, So like everything else this trip....his wish is my command! Harvey drove us through wonderful sheep farming country, and just one hour out of Queenstown we were at a great little river that actually WAS ON the sheep farm! You got it folks, Richard was surrounded by a "fly fishing" dream and SHEEP... which he dreams about ALL the time!! Sheep, Wool, Yarn..... and fish!!!

The day was spectacularly beautiful coupled with the scenery of snow capped mountains, fields and paddocks with over 10,000 heads of sheep and a winding stream as clear as bottled water.

Now I don't know how many of you have ever fly fished but there is lots of stuff happening and things that you have to do ALL at the SAME TIME! First you must spot a fish. Then you figure what you can use to make him bite. Then you tease him along and "spin your yarn" and hope he bites!!! Richard did quite well -- he almost caught 3 fish! The perfect place to be in NZ -- in perfect weather, enveloped by the mountains, by a babbling river and surrounded by 10000 sheep!



We returned to town checked into our hotel- **Eichardt's Private Hotel**. Well let me tell you!!! It was right on the lake with an amazing view surrounded by snow capped mountains! We even have a fire place in the room! Richard said it could be one of the nicest suites he has ever been in!

In the morning we woke up with rain pitter pattering on our skylight over our bed. I opened the curtains to reveal our fantastic view, flicked the switch to turn on the gas fire place, and threw over the fur bed cover. I would have been thrilled to just lie there all day, but the car service picked us up at 11 for a tour around the area. The driver, Blake, drove us through some

of the most mind blowing views of this beautiful country. Every bend in the road was a picture post card! We drove to Arrowtown, an old mining town, with its lovely shops.



I'm sure you know that NZ is known for its dare devil adventure experiences....and is the home of the original **bunja jumping**. We thought well, when in New Zealand you must do what the natives do – jump off a bridge that spans over a river between two sheer drops of mountain rocks! We need to add some spice to our lives....we were told it was an experience of a life time! Very safe... all set up for you....pictures... videos.... the thrill of a life time.... we can do it together in tandem for our

40th!!! Our kids would think it was fantastic and would think we were the COOLEST. That was it -- We had to do it!!!!!!

Except for one thing.....we're chicken, and jumping off bridges is CRAZY no matter how cool our kids would think we are! Sooooo -- we were satisfied taking photos of 2 girls who almost shat in their pants as they jumped screaming all the way down!!

But we are not wooses so we took the jet speed boats that go about 80 miles an hour in only 10 meters of water. They speed through narrow canyons of the river down rapids and do 360 degree turns!!! Not too shabby and we have pictures of us to prove it!!!

We were waiting to hear from our helicopter pilot with **Over The Top** about the **trip to Milford Sound** – IF the clouds would ever clear. Then my cell rang and it was the pilot from Over the Top helicopters telling us the weather has cleared and we were on!! You would think that after such a day there would be little that could top it but,,,,,, this was really OVER THE TOP. I do not have words for the sights that came before our eyes! The



snow capped mountains, the glaciers, and waterfalls and lakes and rivers and valleys! The copter was almost all glass so it really felt like we were birds flying way above the earth below just beholding Gods nature! Sometimes we flew as high as 9000 feet and as fast as 150 miles per hour. The sky was still a bit misty with some snowy clouds which just added to the awe of it all. Then we landed in Milford sound! Wow. really far out!! The sound of the wind blowing through the mountains and the clouds...the water....waterfalls everywherehuge 100 foot trees and green green fauna.....

Now we are back in our room about to go to dinner...looking out at the lake view and all I can say is how blessed we are. These are truly experiences of a lifetime that we will never forget! Along with the 40 wonderful years we have had together! We appreciate each day and are so thank full for all our wonderful blessings.

And PS: Dinner was also magical and delicious....and a wonderful gift from the wonderful agent who helped me plan this trip.....thank you Carolyn!

Date: Mon, 23 Nov 2009
From Wharekauhau

WHAREKAUHAU. Don't even try.....there are only 2 people on this list that can pronounce this name properly!!!! Ok go try.... Ready for it!?????? Fa Ree ...KO....HO..... I told you that you wouldn't get it!??? But what a place!!!!

We flew from Queenstown to **Wellington**, where a car picked us up at the airport and dropped us off at the Heliport. We were then whisked away on a 15min chopper journey that would normally be more then an hour forty five minutes.

Wharekauhau is a working sheep farm but there is also a Lodge on this property. There is a beautiful main house where the meals are served. The decor is perfect... modern" rugged beachy" with exposed beams, and an open kitchen with a chef who makes magic meals! There are several huge sitting rooms decorated to the nines.



Each could easily be photographed for architectural digest. And they take advantage of the expansive view -- a huge green lawn with some palm type trees and shrubs. Behind that two large ponds and a sprawling green sheep paddock filled with plenty of sheep. Then the water – Cook Strait, which separates the North and South Islands. Turn your head slightly to the left and there are mountains, and to the right rolling green hills trees and more paddocks! And, you are only 3000+ miles away from Antarctica. Past the main house is a pool house with a full length pool plus a well equipped gym and a great masseuse. Which pleased both Richard and me!

The "cottages", which are each separate guest suites, are at the other end of the house. There are only 10, each cottage beautifully decorated in whites, pale yellows and sand colors. Vaulted ceilings and exposed beams and plushy soft furniture and a canopy bed as well as a gas fireplace.....and views even from the bathtub and toilet seat!!!



You could just sit and do nothing and take it all in -- but we also did some great stuff! This morning we went on a tour of the sheep farm. Saw them shear the sheep and learned a bit about how the farmers use dogs to herd the sheep. In the afternoon we went clay bird shooting with real guns! The rest of the time we have been just been walking, clicking the shutter, chilaxing and loving it!!!

Each evening we have dined privately in one of the magnificent rooms in the main house. The food and wines were superb!

Fri. 27 Nov 2009 **From Paradise**

Tucked in the hills overlooking **Russell Harbor** with a view of the Bay of Islands, is a piece of Paradise known to the people "in the know" as **Eagles Nest**. At Eagles Nest there is one "cottage" known as Temple of the First Light. And there my friends is where we find our selves on this Thanksgiving 2009.

What a place!! I know I said that about Wharekauhau but ... this place is truly unique! We are in the most northern area of the North Island of NZ - the country's tropics. We took an 8 seater plane over the very tip, where the Tasman Sea collides with the Pacific Ocean -- a fabulous sight! We saw beaches where no one has walked for years (some are protected). There are lots of coves and inlets and Green and NO people. The country is very into conservation and trying to bring back some of the endangered species. When Europeans first came to NZ there were no predators! But they brought mammals and predators (possums) that have diminished the bird population and seem to eat 21 tons of vegetation each night. We landed near a beach for tea and baked goods -- and 30 to 40 foot sand dunes where we "sledded down"!

After a lovely day we were picked up and brought to "**Temple of the First Light**" -- **our villa at Eagle's Nest in Russell**. This is a one bedroom guest house basically made of glass that overlooks all this luscious scenery. All the glass bifold doors open so you can be "inside out." When the doors are all open they lead off to a veranda and the sights are all right there - views of sail boats, fauna, and birds - All of nature surrounding the

Temple!

The centre has a wood burning fire place. The kitchen is open, sleek and modern and filled with all the necessities. It almost looks like an entertainment centre! There is a 52



inch flat screen TV that can roll into the centre of the room, with surround sound and a place for your iPod. The house is wired for Wifi and we were also able to Skype and give a visual tour to family.

The bedroom hangs over the high ceiling open living room with a balcony and a glass railing with a huge sky light over the bed! It had a shade that rolls closed at a flick of a switch. The bathrooms are all glass too but carefully

designed to give you privacy. The shower is a different story! It is out there with a view of the world ...to the world! And it hangs over the living room!! I mustn't forget about the glorious hot tub andMichael our private chef who showed up each evening to cook us a gourmet dinner by candle light on the veranda! This is one wow of a place!

Date: Fri, 27 Nov 2009

From: Re: Auckland

The last morning at First Light was beautiful. Richard even ventured into the kitchen and made omelets. Not bad!!! We were picked up at one o'clock and taken on a tour of the little town of Russell. It was so sweet and quaint. We found a great craft store and found some items we just had to have! Then our driver drove us to **Auckland** -- the CITY OF SAILS. Our driver and guide from **Potiki Tours**, Melissa, picked us up at 10am and off to the **Auckland Museum** for a wonderful explanation about the Maori people. She was Maori and spoke with such passion and love for her heritage. It was a treat to learn from her about the customs and art of her people. After the museum, she took us around the city to contemporary galleries to show us how the Maori have used their heritage in modern art. It was a great way to see glimpses of the city, speak to a native, and see some great and interesting art and installations.

And then it was off to the airport to fly home – all in the same day. I sit here in the business class lounge at LAX waiting for the flight to JFK, the final leg of this most amazing trip. It's all too fresh for me right now to properly reflect on it, but I must say that one of the most wonderful parts of the journey is coming home hand in hand with my wonderful life partner and being able to have experienced this adventure of a lifetime together!

And let's read what Richard has to say about this trip!

Date: Mon, 30 Nov 2009

from: New York

Dear All,

Since you all have had the pleasure of reading Joan's journal of adventure, Joan suggested that I add a brief post script.

Looking back and thinking of all the things we have experienced in New Zealand, nothing matched the majesty and magnificence of the natural wonders that we saw. Flying some 8 miles out to sea and hovering over a Sperm whale watching him take in the oxygen needed before he dived down for a 45 minute search for food... "coptering" over a 9,000 foot mountain range to Milford Sound -- the most spectacular sight we have ever seen with waterfalls cascading hundreds of feet, snow capped mountains with unusual rock formations, valleys with vistas indescribable. That along with meeting many interesting and lovely people made this venture "over the top."

More than ever before in my life have I felt so passionate about preserving these natural wonders of the planet we live in, and how conscious we all should be in our own way to preserve and protect the environment.

We are most fortunate to be home safe and sound. Truly amazing that we were greeted at each stop with a smiling knowable individual who in their own unique way added to this experience (from a former police commissioner to a retired engineer who teaches race car driving) -- ALL the people we met gracious and pleased to meet us.

Just for all to know if you ever want to have an adventure of this sort my first suggestion would be to call Joan, as you can see she designed this adventure and it was flawless.