

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

New Zealand/Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud



Chapter 12

November 2005 - June 2006

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We arrived in [New Zealand](#) on November 12, 2005 and returned to the same YHA Hostel in [Auckland](#) where we had been staying for 3 days before going to Vanuatu. During the first week we were mainly busy sorting out pictures and writing our travel diary about that visit - these stories do not only take a long time to read, they also take a very long time to be written!

Auckland; the City of Sails

The city of Auckland sits on a hilly narrow strip of land between two scenic harbours; the western one opening towards the Tasman sea the eastern towards the Pacific ocean. They proclaimed it "the city of sails", as hundreds of sailing yachts can be seen on any sunny day pushed around by an ever present strong wind. The skyline recently gained a new landmark, when the 328 meter high [Skytower](#) opened for the new millennium.

The area around our youth-hostel edged the city centre and was also very popular with students from Asia, which resulted in the establishment of uncountable little cheap eateries representing every country between India and China. Especially Korean and Japanese restaurants' employees often spoke very little English, but as they mainly served (language-) students from the same countries, they usually didn't have any problem - only with us...

A number of similarities to Australia were quite obvious, as for instance the many shops and companies that have established themselves here too. As most big Australian cities, Auckland offered free public transport in the city centre and everywhere a strict non-smoking policy was enforced in any public building, accommodation and restaurants, sometimes even outdoors. On the other hand, we found that the Kiwis were much more strict in observing rules and regulations and one doesn't get by with the trustful "it's all right Mate" easily, as we always heard in OZ. Here, every membership-card or whatever, was carefully examined. Some procedures seemed really bureaucratic and old fashioned, as were office equipment or sanitary installations. Roads and buildings were not as shiny and well maintained as over the Tasman Sea. Here we saw bridges that were literally rusting and rotting away and we felt we had to hurry crossing, as we were afraid to find out whether the wood or the iron would collapse first.

New Zealand's economy is doing all right, but it's running on a slower pace than Australia's. Many suburbs are newly being built in brick at once. As in Australia, they are usually wooden structures surrounded by a thin facade of bricks. Older houses were entirely made of wood and we found them more charming. They are often standing on stilts, because of the big chance that the earth may tremble.



With 1,2 million inhabitants, Auckland is New Zealand's biggest city, but its traffic is much worse than in Australia's big 5. To make things worse, many Kiwis, including drivers of public buses, drive like maniacs - they are certainly "the Germans of the Pacific".

But we can also say good things about bus drivers: they were very helpful and often dropped us off just in front of the door, where we wanted to go, provided there was no police around. Generally speaking, Auckland wasn't that pedestrian friendly, but there was one thing that should serve as an example for the rest of the world: if traffic lights turned green for pedestrians, on most junctions it was possible to walk diagonally right across the intersection.

None of the other tourists we had talked to said, they had fallen in love with Auckland, but they all loved the rest of the country. So, we knew right from the beginning, that the three months visa we were given on entry would not be enough time for us, and we applied for a visa-extension. Although New Zealand was the first country that stubbornly insisted that we needed an onward ticket out (and so we bought a refundable ticket to Brisbane), it was easy to get our visa extended. Even though it is normal to take 2-3 weeks to proceed, the decision was forwarded by courier and not by ordinary mail. We were granted the 9 months we had asked

for and the letter explicitly mentioned that we could get an additional three months plus an explanation on how to proceed in case we would be interested to get a residency visa. It seems they are pretty keen to extend their 4 Mio. inhabitants with new immigrants, although they most probably target working people and not globetrotters...

New Zealand has a modern approach in handling applications for immigrants and tourist's visa as only one form has to be filled in for people living in the same household, no matter whether they are a couple (married or not) or people of the same sex and the application fee of NZ\$ 85 (Euro 48) has to be paid only once, automatically including the applicant, its partner and children.

Buying a car

Now we were given plenty of time to travel, so we had to look for some means of transport. As we neither know how to fly, nor how to skip a sailing yacht, we opted for a car again - just as plane-loads of other tourists do, that arrived at this time of the year! Again, the models looked different and had other names than in other parts of the world but at least we were used to drive on the "wrong" side of the road by now. Most cars had automatic transmission but we favoured a manual. We were delighted to find out that various private car-fairs were held every week. However, we soon discovered that most cars were not being sold by their actual owners, but by money hungry unofficial dealers, pretending to offer the car of "their sister/uncle/brother/friend or departed traveller, if not of a deceased relative". Of course, most of these shiny 10-20 years old vehicles had little more than 120'000 km on their clock and engines or tyres were always new(ly painted). We've seen bodies and engines including batteries, lovingly coated in oil, so they would look just great!

But we wouldn't despair; we found out that old cars are also being traded at auctions. This was one of the most interesting insights into the car-dealership-Mafia, as we recognized some apparently private guys, who had offered us a car the day before, advertised on the Hostels noteboard. They had come to bid for moving wrecks that went for 200-300 dollars. After brushing them up and covering up the most obvious faults, they would try to sell them for 1-3'000 dollars more.

So we put hopes on finding a good car in the paper. Occasionally, between all the crooks, there was really a honest owner trying to sell his car. The good ones that were offered for a good price, had all sold before we rang. We still got the chance to see some and were in for some more special experiences; the car offered by a lady working for an embassy wasn't the worst: it had quite a lot of scratches outside and looked like a rubbish bin inside and what a staid Kiwi housewife offered, looked inside like a real rubbish dump and the paint looked as if it had never ever been washed. Then, the engine was hardly visible under the dust. Her husband invited us for a test-drive and didn't hesitate to sit on the pile of paper and other rubbish, indicating that they had cared for the car in the same manner.

As always: we were determined to find that needle in the haystack and so we took the train to the big car fair at Ellerslie a second time. With some good luck we noticed a lady with a child among all those crooks, offering her good looking station wagon for 4'500 \$. It was a bit too dear for us, but we asked for her phone number and as we didn't find anything better afterwards, we contacted her later at home and finally got that car for 3'300 \$ (Euros 1'880).

So we became the new owners of a still very good running Ford Telstar 1994, that had 136'000 km on the odometer, which can be proven. It is not uncommon for cars to indicate false (manipulated) mileage, we were told by the previous owner, who works in the financing business. More often than not, she has to refuse a credit, not because of bad credit history of the buyer, but because the prospective deal is worth much less money than asked for, because the odometer has been manipulated. Luckily, there is an institution called "lemon check" that helps verifying this quite easily, at least for cars that haven't been imported as second hand cars.

Suddenly, our four feet could comfortably rest above four wheels and we were ready to start discovering Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud, as Maori named New Zealand.



The Northlands

After finally finding the way out of the city, we made a brief stop at touristy Devonport, which also could be reached by pedestrian-ferry. From there, we continued to [Orewa](#), where we stayed for three nights in a Backpackers place that was up in the green hills but barely out of Auckland's suburbs. From there, we made a day trip to Whangaparaoa peninsula (just wait till we describe the place with the longest Maori name in the world). It is an interesting mix between new urban developments, especially retirement villages and giant shopping centres and unspoilt nature with beautiful coastline. The red [Pōhutukawa](#), that are so typical for northern coastal areas and who are also dubbed "Christmas tree" (as they open their flowers then), started to be in full bloom now.

Our next destination was the Bay of Islands, to which Yuki, a Japanese girl that had stayed at the same Backpackers as we did, joined us. We were amazed how many hills and therefore: how many sharp bendings we had to master on our way up north. A second surprise was how much traffic moved the same way, but that was probably because it was a Saturday. On the way, there was a bee-farm that was quite touristy but it was interesting to see the assiduous bees at work behind the glass wall. North of Whangarei we followed an impressive scenic loop along the coastline from where we could already see many islands. The next attraction was quite special: New Zealand's most photographed loo, designed by Austrian born artist and "eco-"architect Friedensreich [Hundertwasser](#). It was the [public toilet](#) in the village of Kawakawa. Hundertwasser lived near here in an isolated house without electricity from 1973 until his death in 2000. The WC building incorporated many recycled materials as mosaics made of scattered tiles, glass bottles, ceramic pillars and round shapes, as are typical for his style.



In the afternoon, we arrived in Paihia, in the beautiful [Bay of Islands](#), which was a small but very touristy beach-front village. Here we left Yuki behind, after we had double-checked whether she had not only understood that we are nudists, but that we had booked ourselves into a naturist place for that very night. Indeed, she hadn't been aware and after explicitly asking her, whether she was ready for a new experience and wanted to join us, she politely replied: "thank you for asking, but: *NO thank you.*" As she was exceptionally open for a Japanese, we felt that if this offer would arise again to her after a few months more travelling, she might take it.

But for now, we were the only guests at [Nature's Orchard](#), just off the mainroad near Kerikeri. The hosts Fiona and Lyn rent out a cosy double storey annex to their house, which offered more luxury than we needed. It was situated in the midst of a small orange orchard and had a swimming pool and hot spa to enjoy. A

beautiful peacock came visiting quite often and one night there were also some camping guests. Here we quickly learned the lesson that the hole in the ozone layer is even worse than above Australia and we got a bit sunburnt. For our skin, we were happy that it rained quite hefty the next day, as it often did up in the Northlands, which reach into the subtropical zone.



In New Zealand's history, [Waitangi](#) is the most important place, because it is here, where the treaty between the local [Maori](#) chiefs and the Pakeha, the British intruders was signed 1840. The Maoris valued the profit and prestige the Europeans brought and concluded that accepting nominal British authority was the way to get them. When the white people came, Maori, who had themselves arrived as settlers from Polynesian islands 600-1'000 years earlier, they were a proud people with a highly developed society and culture. Today's generation of Maori have adapted in many ways to the culture of the white people, to the good and to the bad, as alcohol and other drugs were not known before. There is just enough culture left to be

marketed for tourism, which usually boosts semi-traditional dancing (in church approved costumes and painted tattoos) and semi-traditional food from the earth oven called hangi (in aluminium containers and electrically heated).

Every now and then tensions arise between Maori and Pakeha, but our over-all impression is that Maori are very well integrated into [New Zealand society](#). We saw them holding supervisor-jobs quite often and their Kiwi-slang was often more distinctive than if white or Asian immigrants spoke. Today's population-mix consists of about 68% Europeans, 15% Maori, 6% Pacific Islanders, 10% Asians and 1% others.

Along scenic roads, we continued northwards till we reached the narrow northern tip of Aupouri Peninsula. Half way up, we stayed at a nice hostel in **Henderson Bay** from where we explored the huge sand dunes behind [90 Mile Beach](#). At the end of the road (= the end of New Zealand) was Cape Reinga light house, superbly situated on a steep hill from where you can see the Tasman sea and the South Pacific ocean meet. Back in the Backpackers, we set off to some beach walks and discovered some more sand dunes. Not all were of the same golden colour, some were snow white and others almost pink. In the morning we could enjoy a fresh bread we had been ordering and that came now straight out of the bread-maker. In addition, we could enjoy a percolated coffee thanks to a Bodum plunger, an equipment provided by many Backpackers. All that made us strong enough to help a French traveller who had a flat tyre. Only two days ago, Heinz insisted on buying the missing tool, as he had discovered that we would not be able to change a wheel in case we'd have a flat tyre. Brigitte had been rather careless about it, since we had a set of good tyres. But one never knows and: voilà! The French guy was glad that Heinz had persisted, as the very same tool was missing in his car.

Via Kaitaia and another nice and hilly scenic drive, we reached Kohukohu, where we stayed at Treehouse Backpackers. This was clustered to a slope of rainforest and included several small cottages and a big communal house. The next day we crossed the fjord on a ferry to Rawene. Further south, we soon came into dense forest, where the tallest [Kauri](#) trees can be found. The biggest was named [Tane Mahuta](#) (god of the forest) and it measures 51 meters with a very big straight trunk. It's age is estimated to be between 1'200-2'000 years old. A very impressive sight indeed! Some of the Kauri trees host up to 30 species of parasite plants, such as moss, fungus, lichen or green plants.

As in many other parts of New Zealand, the forests are very dense and rich on beautiful [tree ferns](#) of which 80 species exist, if we include all types of fern, the number doubles. Growing up to 20 metres high, tree ferns look like palm trees. But there is actually also a native palm endemic to New Zealand: the [Nikau](#).

Further south, we stayed at Helensville, where we found a house dealer who put nearly 40 houses on display in his big yard. They had been moved here and were now resting on barrels waiting for new owners. Only the smallest ones were left in one piece, but most were cut in half or even into 3 or 4 pieces, ready for transport to a new property. As most houses are simple wooden buildings without insulation and double glazing windows, it's easy to cut and relocate them on big trucks. Most houses here don't have cellars, maybe a concrete floor, but often they rest on stilts in order to be earth-quake proof.

From two superbly situated viewing terraces, it was possible to observe breeding [gannets](#) near Muriwai Beach. The single standing rock the colony had initially populated had become too small and so many birds were breeding on top of the cliffs on shore, some just next to the viewing platform. These were quite big waterbirds with beautiful faces.

To avoid the holiday rush on the road, we wanted to stay in a naturist camp for about two weeks over the New Year's period. Heinz proposed to check out [Oranui](#) in West Auckland as this was on our way. Brigitte initially refused to consider this place, as she wanted to be as far out of Auckland as possible. However, when we



went there on a week end, she fell in love with that place immediately and insisted to reserve it right away for holiday.

After that we spent two days at the City Garden lodge in Auckland's noble suburb of Parnell. We had to pick up some mail and invest in Mövenpick ice cream and in French Restaurants.

Coromandel Peninsula

On December 14th, we left the city again and enjoyed the beautiful coastline along the Firth of Thames.

[Thames](#) was a charming little town at the base to the [Coromandel Peninsula](#). From there, the road followed northwards sharply along the coastline with many red flowering "Christmas trees" contrasting with the water.



From Coromandel Town, we went out to discover the northernmost part just in time before heavy rains arrived. We ended up staying for 4 nights at Tui Lodge Backpackers, two of them only waiting till the heavy downpours finally stopped. We passed our time talking to the other guests and Brigitte managed to bake a wonderful gingerbread for all, composed of ingredients all found in the communal shelf, where guests leave behind what they don't want anymore.

We were lucky to continue on a sunny day that revealed wonderful views from the top of the hill down to the island dotted gulf between the Coromandel and Auckland. On the eastern side of the peninsula, we could visit a natural arch on the beach, called cathedral cove still in beautiful sunshine. We avoided "hot water beach" where flocks of people dug holes into the sand at a certain time of the tide.

We didn't feel like filling our bathing suits with sand and went instead to [Katikati Naturist Park](#) where we arrived in the rain. For the next two days that was quite a common sight, but as they had sauna and spa pool, we got wet anyway.

Still strange for us to find such a big resort near empty, knowing that school holidays had begun and learning that all accommodation and camping spaces were booked out for the week over New Year. Again, we were lucky and the sun was back on the day we left, so we stayed on until the middle of the afternoon.

Rotorua: where the Australian and the Pacific tectonic plates meet

The distance to [Rotorua](#), our next destination, was not very long. Here we stayed at another nice Backpackers place and without asking, we got exactly that kind of room they "don't have", if people explicitly ask for, as they prefer not to have spoilt luxury travellers staying there. We were given a pretty posh and big en-suite room with queensize bed. Also here, the hostel had a very good atmosphere and we easily got together with the other travellers exchanging tips about the many thermal parks Rotorua's surrounding has to offer. The only one that was for free was Kuirau, right in the heart of the city. Already here we could see steaming ponds and bubbling water holes. Virtually every tourist will come to see this town, where sulphur steam can be seen and smelled in many back yards. Across the middle of the North Island, the [Australasian and the Pacific plate](#) rub and therefore create a fascinating but dangerous ring of fire with many volcanoes and thermal activities. Earthquakes occur almost monthly, but thanks to the geology and the way buildings are constructed, even strong ones usually don't cause any damage. Today, geothermal energy is used to produce electricity and hot water. Of course the natural hot water has too many minerals and is therefore not suitable for every-day's tap water.



Together with Connie from Berlin, we visited [Wai O Tapu](#) thermal area. According to the brochure, there was a geyser scheduled to erupt daily at 10:15 am and we wondered why? After purchasing the \$ 23 ticket, every visitor was directed to a tribune that had been built around the cone of a geyser. In time, a park-warden arrived and explained to the crowd that without human interference, Lady Knox Geyser would erupt at unpredicted times about once every 2-3 days in various forces. But to please the tourists, he would now drop some "soap type organic substance" into the cone and thus the fountain would be activated at medium strength within the next few minutes. Wow - what a circus: everybody was soon able to take the very same picture - some posing in front of the fountain. For us, the other sights of the thermal park were far more impressive, as for example the large boiling and steaming 'Champagne' pool, craters and sulphur holes, colourful mineral terraces and bubbly mud pools or ponds in the most eerie colours.

On the way back, we soaked in thermal water at [Waikite Valley](#) that was diverted from a small steamy river. The vegetation around it was incredibly green whereas the area around Wai O Tapu had been rather dry. The



water was collected almost boiling hot and had to be cooled down, which was done by spraying it up into the air as fountains. The three of us rented a hot-tub that was in a cabin opening towards the other side of the valley. The water felt very soft and it was a relaxing 20 minutes before the heat got too much to our heads.

As these thermal parks are really fascinating, we invested in another entrance fee and visited [Orakei Korako](#). This one featured big silica terraces that are mineral covered fault scarps created by an earthquake long time ago. There was a very colourful algae that grows only in high water temperatures. There were big bubbling mud pools and there was a geyser, which didn't erupt when we were there, as it was left to nature.

After we, as well as Connie, had unsuccessfully tried various Backpackers places to reserve for X-Mas, we all changed plans and the three of us found beds in Tongariro National Park. Together with thousands of Christmas-shoppers, we squeezed through a supermarket, filling our bags with delicious food and then went on. We passed [Lake Taupo](#), which is a huge crater lake, formed by one of the greatest volcanic explosions the earth has probably experienced. How big must this volcano have been, if it's crater, which is now lake Taupo, has approximately 40 km in diameter? It's eruption must have taken place about 27'000 years ago and may have buried the entire North Island under up to 100 Meters of ashes.0

Tongariro Crossing

In miserable weather we reached the Backpackers place in the village that is simply called "National Park". During the winter (not now, even though the weather felt like that) it is a ski resort but in summer, most people come here for hiking on the three volcanoes. In a straight line of about 20 km, snow covered Mount Ruapehu 2797 M towers before Mount Ngauruhoe 2287 M and Mount Tongariro 1967 M high. One walk is particularly famous and considered the finest one-day trek in New Zealand: the [Tongariro Crossing](#). As weather in this mountainous region is always unpredictable, many people wait for a week or two and sometimes still have to abandon this project. During the first 25 days of December, it was only possible to do the walk on three or four days. Otherwise it was either too foggy, too windy, too rainy and cold or a combination of all. Even if you can set off in good weather, conditions can change with alarming speed. Most trekkers get bus transportation to one end and pick-up from the other. As tour operators are responsible to bring back as many sheep as they dropped off in the morning, they normally make the decision whether they provide transport, at 7 o'clock in the morning. Already on our second day, the weather had become nice, but as the wind blew with 120 km/h on the saddle of the volcano, the Backpackers lodge cancelled the trip. On the third day, the 25th, we got a Christmas present and we were chauffeured to the base of the volcanoes. There were some clouds around, but they seemed to disappear. Energetically, our group walked up the first barren lava slope with many tall lava clods turned into stony sculptures. Then came the most strenuous part with an hour of climbing up very steeply to the foot of Mt. Ngauruhoe's cone. Suddenly, a strong wind caught upon us but we're sure this was much less than it would have been yesterday. From behind, fog was coming in frighteningly close and we tried to hurry up. This wind felt ice cold and Brigitte's fingers quickly went numb, even with socks on hands, as she didn't travel with gloves. When we reached the top, we could see right down

into "red crater" which was a very spectacular view, even though it wasn't red of lava as Yasur in Vanuatu. With this strong wind it was not tempting to rest and look down for too long, as we were almost afraid of getting blown down if we approached the steep rim too much. Even though; forms and colour left by lava were most impressive! We just walked a bit further, now downhill steeply, and three tiny lakes became visible. Those were the Emerald Lakes and their different colours became more spectacular as we approached them from above. Everything became pleasant, as we now had reached the volcano's windsheltered side and the clouds and fog miraculously disappeared within only a few minutes.

Now we were very happy and decided to have our pic-nic lunch here. Only difficulty was to decide whether we should rest at the blue, at the bright green or the deep green little lake. It was just magnificent!

Shortly after we continued our hike, a German couple joined the path from the side. What a surprise: we had met them already four times here in New Zealand. The remaining three hours of the walk were very easy, slowly leading down to the pick-up point. After the bus had brought the happy crowd back to the lodge, everybody queued to get a session assigned in the spa pool, as the management didn't want to have the nudes mixed with the prudes. We soaked together with Connie before we started to prepare another gourmet Christmas meal. Already the two nights before, the three of us did some fancy cooking and also all the other travellers formed little groups preparing exquisite meals together.

As was to be expected, our muscles went a bit sore the following days but we were lucky not to have one blister to our feet.

The next day we waved good bye to Connie and all the others and turned north again, where we soon found warm summer climate again.



Waitomo caves

We stopped in a farm hostel in **Te Kuiti**, near [Waitomo caves](#), which we visited the same day. A guide led about 20 people into a wonderful limestone cave, which was very narrow in some parts and very wide in other, where there was even a tiled floor. Because acoustics are just formidable in there, various concerts with famous singers had been held. Upon invitation by the guide, one tourist: a lady from Hong Kong gave a short proof of that with her wonderful voice.

Waitomo cave is also very famous for its glow worms. A river flows through big parts of the cave and ten thousands of glow worms attached to the ceiling above the water illuminate this section so brightly, we could see our surrounding. The guide now led us into a boat which he was gently pulling on a rope over the quiet cave-water. It was fascinating and felt like gliding along under a very intense milky way.

The whole life-cycle of these glow worms, which are actually insects, is very interesting. In the larval stage, the [fungus-gnat](#), as it's called, produces greenish light to attract its prey. Beforehand, they weave 20-30 sticky threads that look like pearl beads. If an insect gets stuck, the caterpillar-like glow worm larva reels in the thread and eats its catch. The larval stage is the only time the insect can feed and after about 6-9 months it's fat and pupates. After about two weeks a fly without a mouth emerges and within two days it mates and the female lays about 120 eggs, before the adult fly starves. Only three weeks later new larva hatch and the cycle starts again.

Not far from Waitomo, another attraction could be explored in Otoroganga. There was a [Kiwi House](#) and native bird park. In the Kiwi house, night and day were reversed and so we could observe two [Kiwi](#) birds in their active time in their enclosure. Heinz felt a bit sorry for them being in a cage and leading a life as inmates. On the other hand, here they tried to breed more of these flightless birds as they have become endangered mainly because of the many new predators, which were all introduced into New Zealand. Once there must have been millions of them running around, but today only about 30'000 remain and if humans cannot succeed in breeding help, they might be extinct quite soon.

There were also Falcons, Owls, Ducks, [Pukekos](#) and other birds, Geckos and other reptiles in big enclosures. All animals were kept as natural as possible and their meals were often served alive after closing hours, because many visitors get distressed when confronted with the natural circle of catch and prey. Still, some leftovers of the prey could be seen in some cages.

Auckland Outdoor Naturist Club ORANUI

Now our holiday had come and we went back to [Auckland Outdoor Naturist Club ORANUI](#), which is situated in a suburb west of the city and literally surrounded by new housing developments and a school. The club exists already for 50 years and used to be in the middle of nowhere. Still, there seem to be no problems at all; as there is only a gate for cars, pedestrians can just walk in. Inside, it feels like in a natural park in the midst of the city. There are some very tall pine trees and a little river flows through the grounds. A tall bamboo fence provides wind-shelter as we have also seen it on many orchards. It's probably New Zealand's biggest naturist ground by size (11 Ha) and by members (250). As it was very quiet during our stay, it didn't feel that big. They have three cabins for rent of which we took the biggest one, as only this was equipped with 4 hotplates and a baking oven. The one hotplate and microwave version of the cheaper huts didn't tempt us.

We were under the impression that half of the members were overseas born, but on the other hand, among the real Kiwis were also some Maori members.



The weather continued to change frequently between sunny, rainy and very windy but temperatures were usually above 20°C degrees and towards the end of our stay they raised, so we didn't even leave, when our cottage was reserved by somebody else, but moved for 3 days into a smaller cabin.

There was a nice club house, a big pool, sauna and jacuzzi to enjoy and great shopping possibilities almost on our doorstep, as a railway station and a cyber café. We discovered that all three bakeries that were within walking distance had closed for the New Years holiday. Never mind, the bread Brigitte baked almost daily was anyway much better, as NZ is just another country where "real bread" is hard to find. We wonder: what is the best invention "since sliced bread"? As they say here...

Otherwise we feel that it's much easier to find decent and affordable quality food in New Zealand than in Australia. Not only fresh fish and live mussels could be found almost everywhere, probably thanks to the Maori population. Also a wide selection of superb cheeses and pâté is readily available and so it was easy to feast our two weeks at Oranui away, even though the weather was not always perfect.

One afternoon we drove out along a road called scenic drive that passed very near the club. Driving through intense fern forest and mastering many bending, we enjoyed spectacular views to the city, as well as down to the ocean, before we reached the black sand beach at Piha, where many surfers rode on the wild waves.

North-Island: discovering the west-Coast

After almost 3 weeks, we left Oranui in Auckland. The next three days, we stayed at a Backpackers hostel in [Tauranga](#). Together with neighbouring **Mount Maunganui**, it is one of New Zealand's fastest growing regions and a popular holiday destination due to its rather mild climate and lovely setting on the water.

There were many nice beaches to choose from and so we were totally surprised that we were approached by a family as soon as we had put our towels and trousers down. We had first met in Oranui only a few days ago.

If the sun was out, the weather quickly felt hot. Those days, we figured would be quite limited and so Brigitte considered, it should be the duty of the next owner of our car, to re-gas our air-conditioner. However, as air-conditioners of cars don't get weaker slowly, it stopped working here and now! Sweating like a pig, Brigitte changed her mind and we tried to find a workshop, at the same time as dozens of locals who had also waited

until the summer heat had come and their air-conditioner had broken down. But we were lucky and found a small Autoelectrician-workshop that felt pity and did the job on the spot.

When walking along the seafront promenade of Mt. Maunganui, we were making fun of the locals we saw sitting romantically in their cars, enjoying the view, whilst munching down their newspaper wrapped dinner. Tauranga and also Mt. Maunganui were lined with restaurants hoping to attract those people who were willing to spend more time eating.

Now, we started our big tour around the East Cape. Along uncounted kiwi fruit orchards, we reached the pretty seaside town of Whakatane, before continuing to [Opotiki](#). The Backpackers we stayed at, was called Beach House and such was its location. It was only a small but cosy place and we spent the evenings with all the other guests, some of whom we met again further down the road later.



As we waited till a day of rain passed by, we could enjoy the coastal scenery in good weather again, and saw it in green and blue, as most of the East Cape road bent sharply along the shoreline.

Whanarua Bay was only 88 km on, but the location of the next hostel was too good to be missed, as it was right down by a secluded bay and as close to the water as it could be. Although the inside of the house wasn't that great, it was the location and it's balconies on different levels that made it so special. Our hosts were a

Maori family and they let us use their kayaks in the sheltered natural harbour, which was great fun. Although Brigitte hadn't been brave enough to get into the sea at Tauranga, here we had no choice but to get our bums wet if we wanted to use these boats. Those modern kayaks were purposely built with holes, so we sat on some kind of plastic slice of Emmental cheese. Another tricky thing was to steer that thing straight over the water. So far, we had only experience in a double canoe and if we couldn't paddle where we wanted to go, it was always Heinz' mistake! But here, miraculously, Heinz floated straight ahead, whereas Brigitte's canoe was turning round in circles.

In the end we both managed somehow to explore the inlet along its rocky shores that often had little caves.



When we continued our trip, Michael a German cyclist, asked us to carry part of his luggage to the next hostel along the road. As most people living around the cape, also the owners there were Maori and although we didn't stay, they offered us coffee + cake. Their house was also superbly situated on a rocky beach and we would have been tempted to stay, but the place was booked out, as they only had 10 beds. So we enjoyed an hour mingling with their guests and taking in the view before we went on to East Cape lighthouse. Several hundred steps needed to be climbed, before reaching the top from where we had a nice view down to the very blue ocean.

Now the road over the hills led a bit inland until we hit the coast again at **Tokomaru Bay**. Here we stayed at another charming Backpackers, this one was situated a bit on a hill overlooking the village and the bay. There were 3 funny open lofts, each sleeping two. They were partitioned off by curtains and had windows on two sides and instead of a door they had a ladder up. With only 15 beds, it was very intimate as well and we had great fun with the other guests. As we stayed four nights, we met up with several people we had already seen in previous hostels and even the cyclist caught up with us again.

Liz, a 60 year old English lady was temporary caretaker and she was constantly around making jokes with the people from all walks of life, between age 20 - 70.

Compared with Australia, there is a big difference in the way how the Backpackers Hostels here appear: they are much cleaner and cosier, but the biggest part of the difference lies in how travellers to New Zealand behave. Most visitors know how to have fun without need for a daily party and visit to the pubs. They rather enjoy a deep revealing discussion with other guests from all over the world. On the other side, for many Backpackers to Australia, the visits to bars and pubs are the highlights of their trip it seems.

Backpackers-Hostel in New-Zealand

In New Zealand, there is an association called **BBH ([Budget Backpackers Hostel New Zealand](#))**, which consists of more than 360 Backpackers Hostels throughout Kiwiland, with an average of less than 30 beds. They were in general clean, cosy and very sociable. Their quality standard was quite high and this was also due to the rating given by the guests that were staying the previous year.

The backpackers that stay at these places in New Zealand, are in general more mature, and we don't mean "old", as the average tourist staying is below 30 years old. Almost everybody talks to each other and often we engaged in deep discussions with 20 year olds.

Of course, there are also a handful of 'party-places', but they are an exception, as are those visitors who often drink lots of booze. Curiously, we met quite often people in their early twenties complaining about the Backpackers places in Australia, where only the young and the party-freaks go.

Here, somebody that only opens a tin or eats 'baked beans on toast' is a rarity, normally a local. But this was a common sight in OZ. But here, even those complaining about their tight budget can regularly be seen cooking with olive oil, balsamico vinegar and fresh meet, fish and veggies. Some even carried plungers or coffee pots along for their quality coffee. Sofar, we hadn't come across a hostel here, where we were handed out only a basic cutlery set as in some Australian hostels. Most kitchens were well equipped and many travellers revealed themselves as good hobby-chefs engaging often in real cooking competitions. Here at Tokomaru Bay, for instance, every night several Backpackers had lobster for dinner, thanks to Liz who knew a Maori couple that caught and sold them. You will understand that we didn't only sit and watch.



We also appreciated that many hostels opted not to provide TV, in order to create an even more sociable atmosphere, and this worked! It was much nicer to talk without a constant background noise of shooting and screaming from the TV and here most fellow travellers agreed that those violent movies are mainly inspiring violence instead of giving education.

At first, we sometimes watched TV, as it always reveals something of the national culture. We were surprised (and shocked) by the low level that was not even higher when it came to the national news that were being broadcast on state owned TV1. Any tabloid focuses on more serious subjects of importance to the world. The one hour "show" usually started with New Zealand's most shaking events like: "a prisoner released from jail, police stopping speedy drivers or drunk youths, shark sightings along the coast, small accidents on the road or at sea or in the household, their following court cases, treatment of and interview with victims. How a child was healed of his mysterious illness and another one given the wrong prescription. An actor using a water-pistol against paparazzi and what famous person is pregnant or having an affair". Each of these very important subjects could take up to 15 minutes, separated by advertisements. Sometimes they sacrificed one or two minutes about the real world, outside of these islands, before coming to the real highlight of the show: sports news. A Chinese immigrant figured that Rugby will always be more important to Kiwis than whether Iran starts an atomic war!

Well: our problems concentrated on the weather and when the next period of rainy days was over, we enjoyed our drive under blue skies but shortly before reaching [Morere hot Springs](#), we had to dive into a very black cloud that poured down on us as if we were in a waterfall for several kilometres.

Nothing better we could do than soaking in the natural mineral water. A superbly designed roof on stilts covered various pools in the rainforest. They had different temperatures and we whiled our time away talking to the other bathers until we were all wrinkly.

We stayed at the same hostel we had been on our last trip and after the owner had told us where we could find the old guest-books, we even found our own entry, made exactly 13 years and 3 days ago: on 22.01.1993.



The next place we visited was [Napier](#); Brigitte's favourite town. Big parts of the city had been devastated in an earth quake 1931. The entire city had been rebuilt in Spanish inspired "Art Deco" style that had been in fashion then. We enjoyed wandering the streets and admired the ornaments that decorated most buildings in the centre and also in neighbouring Hastings. Many of the decorations on the buildings had simple geometrical forms and were often painted in pastel colours.

On our way further south, we passed a hill, called "[Taumatawhakatangiangaakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu](#)". It is registered as [the longest place name in the world](#) and translated from Maori, it is a shortened form of: "The hilltop where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as landeater, played his flute to his loved one".



We crossed a sea of hills that never seemed to end. Because all of the forest that once covered these hills has been turned into furniture or fire wood, the landscape looked naked and brown. In many places erosion has washed the soil away and landslides were frequently covering parts of the road or washed out sections of it. We stayed overnight at a farm-hostel in **Pongaroa**, before reaching civilisation again in **Palmerston North**.

North-Island: the Taranaki-Region

From there we continued to [Wanganui](#) that was similar in size but much more charming for our taste. In another nice Backpackers place, we were lucky to get a double room with a romantic bay-window overlooking the [Whanganui River](#).

Only a few days ago, the movie "River Queen" starring the Whanganui River had been released and the New Zealand tourist board only hopes that a new mass of "River Queen" tourists soon will flock into the country, now as the hysteria of the tourists wanting to see the places where the "Lord of the Rings" movies had been recorded, is ebbing out. For us who have not much knowledge of famous actors, it is quite unbelievable how so many people undertake expensive journeys just to follow their favourite star's footsteps.

Never mind, we followed this river valley as far as the little unsealed road would take us and it really did have great beauty! As the source of this river came from Tongariro National Park in the centre, we stayed overnight at the same place as on X-Mas. When leaving the next morning, we could admire the three volcanoes once more from a distance. Mount Ruapehu had much less snow now than 6 weeks ago.

Crossing another "sea of hills" on a gravel road, we made now our way to the west coast where we were rewarded with some nice coastal scenery. Soon we reached [New Plymouth](#). Behind that city, there is the second highest volcano of the country (after Ruapehu), **Mount [Taranaki/Egmont](#)** with 2518 Meters. More often than not, it is hidden in clouds and thus not everyone will see it. There is a saying: "if you see Taranaki it is going to rain, if you don't see it, it is raining".

New Plymouth has 50'000 inhabitants and occupies quite a nice seaside location, although the heavy industry around the harbour doesn't make for the most charming backdrop.

On the next day we set off to venture around the volcano. After driving up for 20 km, we came into fog but found it still interesting to walk in this rainforest, as it had very special vegetation, due to its frequent rain. Higher up, there was no more greenery; only black ashes.

That day, clouds persisted only on one side of the mountain and so we drove down and around and later took another road up on the sunny side. There was also a very scenic spot on the small artificial lake Mangamaroe on which black swans and (normal) ducks were swimming between the tiny islets on which tree fern and other Kiwi trees were growing. We found this idyllic spot with the towering volcano in the background thanks to the freaky old bloke from our Backpackers place. He had given his accommodation a very special character by decorating everything with old push bikes.

From there we went back to Wanganui, where we were lucky again to get a room with bay window overlooking the river and as before, we saw the rain coming down until finally a rainbow appeared in the evening.

Te Marua, Wellington Naturist club

Although the weather wasn't that perfect, we went to stay for a while at [Te Marua, Wellington Naturist club](#) in **Upper Hut**, 40 km out of the capital. Here we got a small but very nice room that had been renovated tastefully and the work had only just finished last week. Sofa, curtains, bedding; everything was made in matching colours. The location of the club was in the midst of a residential area and next to a school. There was even a bungy-tower from where you could see into the grounds from less than 100 meters away but nobody seemed to bother. The camping area was set up perfectly landscaped up the valley with a small rivulet flowing through over which a 20 meter long pedestrian bridge connected both sides of the property. There was a big swimming pool and a well equipped kitchen for campers and those guests of the cabins like us, for whom the microwave in the room was not enough.

A very big club house hosted a library, two TV lounges upstairs, ping-pong table, indoor boules, sauna, jacuzzi and more.

The first day, an English couple: Jane and John were our neighbours, just as two months ago in Oranui and so we spontaneously had dinner together. During the 11 days we stayed, there were usually between 10-25 people together, many of whom owned caravans. We didn't get to talk to many of them, but one we certainly will remember, was brother Simon. He told us that he had joined the nudist club 20 years ago whilst he belonged to a religious order. Two years ago, whilst helping with the clean-up after a storm

he met a lady on the fence, who has her house next to the club. And so it came that he left his life as a monk and married at 63 but today he is still fearing that the priest will find out that he is a naturist.

As the weather got warm and sunny during our stay, we enjoyed the shade of the big trees and weren't motivated to go out too often. But one sight-seeing trip we did, was back over the hills to Cape Palliser. The drive was very nice but the real highlight was a seal colony. We pictured many of these lazing creatures sunbathing on our behalf.



On February 20, 2006 we packed up and drove down to Wellington. First we visited the Kiwi-Family we had met at Morere Hotsprings. Gill and Grant and their daughters live in a big house in the suburb of Days Bay and they spoiled us with lunch. Later we continued around the bay and drove into the hustle and bustle of [Wellington](#) downtown. The city offered all the amenities that you can expect of a capital but it hadn't grown in a well designed way. Still, we found it had a more charming character than Auckland and we walked around the windy streets - it seems to be very windy all the time. We took the cable car to the viewpoint and visited some museums, sat in the library, in internet-café's and restaurants.

New Zealand's South Island: the Marlborough Sounds

On February 23, 2006 we boarded the ferry to the South Island . Just as the line of cars was being directed into the vessels big "parking lot", a sudden thunderstorm unloaded over Wellington . Thus the beginning of the journey was quite shaky but as we entered the Marlborough Sounds, the clouds disappeared and we had a wonderful sailing through the fjordlands to [Picton](#). What once was only a loading port, had become a touristy little seaside village with a few nice street café's. After a shopping stop we followed the twisting and very scenic coastal road called " Queen Charlotte Drive " 40 km to **Havelock**. Here we stayed overnight and were astonished how much this sleepy hamlet had grown.

The forest-clad [Marlborough Sounds](#) looked untouched and most beautiful but every now and then a house could be seen on a bay. Many places could only be reached by boat, but there were also some roads leading far out to the fjords.

There were many options for tourist accommodation but most were very dear. On the other hand, there were also some Backpackers Hostels including the two best rated BBH associates. Our curiosity, paired with our wish to linger in the beauty of this landscape, inspired us to make reservations in the latter two places. At first we drove on the very scenic road along Kenepuru Sound and reached **Mohana Lodge** situated in a small bay.



Throughout New Zealand , many popular hiking treks lead for several days through attractive areas and the Marlborough Sounds has two of them. They are usually designed such that hikers can easily hike from one overnight stop to the next. Usually these are basic campgrounds or simple huts with a few bunk beds. But here on "[Queen Charlotte Track](#)" everything has been done to improve the creature's comfort. Along this trek 5 different boat companies compete to get the hiker's luggage from one overnight stop to the next, so people need to walk with their lunch pack only. Later at Milford trek, we even saw that you could have your luggage airlifted by helicopter. Those that really wanted some hardship could camp in a national park campground but why should they? Here on the "Queen's trek" hikers could also choose between luxury resorts, B&B's or Backpackers for any night they wanted to spend. Mohana Lodge Backpackers was one of them and they also spoiled their tired guests with delicious but low priced meals. Due to its high client's rating in the BBH guide, in addition many guests started coming by car just to while a day away in this beautiful and superbly located house. We belonged to those. We only just made a baby-hike, sunbathed for a while on a secluded viewpoint and took advantage of the kayaks that could be used for free.



From here we drove later to the other side of the Kenepuru peninsula and stayed at [Hopewell Lodge](#). This Backpackers catered rather for touring travellers who came to relax or engage in some small holiday activities like walking, kayaking, relaxing in a hammock or soaking and chatting in the spa pool that was situated right by the fjord. Some liked it at sunrise, others at sunset, in between or even under the starlit sky. The owners Linley and Mike provided also the necessary know-how and equipment to collect oysters from the beach or to catch fish. On top of eating these delicacies, the hostel served 20 kg of fresh green lipped mussels every second day. To sit together with everyone on a big table was great fun. As in most good hostels, there was no TV but a guitar that was being used quite often, when everybody sat together in the evening around the logfire. Also here we met a very interesting bunch of people and although English was most often spoken, in fact more than 70% of the guests were German speaking natives, 20% came from England or North America and less than 10% from the rest of the world. Not many Kiwis stayed in

the small Backpackers hostels and the owners didn't seem to be sad about this, as some locals apparently caused problems when drinking too much which spoiled the atmosphere.

There was internet access and a rare kind of washing machine using hot water. Everybody was fond of the heavy and crusty continental style bread that could be ordered and that kept the three "bread-makers" (machines!) almost continuously working. As this bread was far better than what could be found in New Zealand's bakeries, the 22 guests ordered up to 12 loafs a day. You see: even for a backpackers' price we got royal treatment and a million dollar location; no wonder that 65% of all guests prolong their stay at Hopewell .

Here in New Zealand many hostels know and fulfil the preferences and wishes of their preferred guests so well, it is not surprising that some of these "traveller heavens" in fact became almost little ghettos for a predominantly German speaking crowd. Prices in these Backpackers ranged from about Euro 13 p. person in a double room or E 9-11 in a dorm, which normally had only between 3-6 beds.

After 5 days, we drove the two and a half hours windy gravel road around the fjords back to the main-road and continued then over forested hills to [Nelson](#). Here the main road was tree-lined and had quite a number of street café's. We got the impression the little town had remained small and quiet.

South Island: Mapua Leisure Park

Now we headed to [Mapua Leisure Park](#). It was here, where we had decided about 13 years ago, to drop out and save for the trip we are on right now. Even though some things had changed and the camp-ground was now "cloths optional" for only two months per year (Feb./March), this place had still something magic to us. It was situated on a tidal river mouth right on the beach. Feeling the sun unhindered on our skin in this beautiful landscape, provided us with just the right environment for thoughts about braking some taboos and we are still convinced that we did the right thing when we quit our jobs and sold everything almost 7 years ago to leave on 12.5.99 when Brigitte was 37 and Heinz 39.

This time we were again in the process of forming our future travel plans. To us, Mapua is still a wonderful place and this not only because there were sandflies that didn't bite; it also is reflecting the great tolerance of New Zealand's society. All of the 50 plus chalets and motel units had been taken over the weekend, mostly by non-naturists. Many also just used it as a base and went to some function in the area. Although many Kiwis are quite prudish and rather keep their swimming gear on even in the shower, they normally don't have a problem if others bare it all, even if they stay on the next site, but they wouldn't stare at them either. By Monday the crowds had left and the remaining guests were predominantly naturists, at least until the next weekend. The sauna was a good place to socialise, as it was heated daily at a certain time and many long-term guests were there and loved to tell stories.

Census day

After a few days, we continued to [Blenheim](#), where we had to take part in "NZ [Census](#) night". Now we found out why the total number of the population mix of the census 2001 always had added up to about 120%. The residents are levelled to 100% but as the government want to include anybody who is in the country at the "count day", e.g. tourists, language students, business delegates or airline crew etc, the number adds up and up... As this survey was carried out on March 7, 06, which was still the hight of the tourist season, the number of people got a bit out of proportion, because the 4 million Kiwis receive a total of about 2 million visitors annually. Some small touristy places probably have increased their population several times over that day.

Such a place was [Kaikoura](#), our next destination. Along its coast it is possible to get quite close to several seal colonies and schools of dolphins can be seen quite regularly. The biggest business, however, are whale watching tours that draw big numbers of tourists. As we had seen plenty of whales in Western Australia six months ago, there was no money to be made with us.



South Island: twice across

From here we went zick-zacking over the mountains from the east- to the west- and back to the east-coast. First we came through a very scenic river valley with many "one lane bridges" along the road. We stayed overnight at [Hanmer Springs](#), a resort village that is famous for its thermal pools. It was funny to watch the bathers arrive in their cars wearing swimming costumes and towels around their waist, but even more so to see them leave the same way, wearing maybe a T-shirt over the wet stuff. It was quite cool and windy here, but due to peer pressure, they preferred not to get changed in the wardrobe.

We were lucky that someone directed us to a small natural hotspring on a river, where we could bare it all, as the young local lady had done, who was already there when we arrived. After an hour chatting in the warm water, we tried to hop back into our cloths quicker than the sandflies could bite us. Then we continued over Lewis Pass and later reached a very nice Backpackers hostel outside of **Westport**. It was a so-called "Eco Lodge" with solar power, composting toilets that didn't smell and drinking water collected from the roof.



Not far from there, we visited the rock formations called "[Pancake Rocks](#)" in [Punakaiki Np.](#) on the west coast. It's easy to see why this name was given, as the many limestone formations looked like stacks of pancakes indeed and there were also some amazing blow holes rushing the crushing waves up into the air. We visited on a very busy Sunday morning and considering the nice pathways and visitor centre that had been built, it was a pleasant surprise that there was no entrance fee.

Via Greymouth and a very steep pass road, we drove up to the settlement of [Arthur's Pass](#). We stayed in a cosy Mountain

lodge where a log fire was kept burning around the clock. As autumn was slowly approaching, the nights started to get chilly and so all those backpackers we had been staying at on the South Island sofar, had had a log fire in the evenings. Of course up here, at 925 meters above sea level, it was quite a bit colder than on the coast but we still felt it was a bit overdoing to keep a fire going during the day when temperatures reached 15°C degrees outside. For hiking, however, these temperatures were ideal but we still started sweating quite soon as we climbed up Scotts track to enjoy spectacular views of the surrounding valley, snow capped mountains and glaciers.

Also the drive out from Arthurs Pass towards Christchurch was most beautiful with several little lakes and very different looking mountains.

Christchurch and the Banks Peninsula

In [Christchurch](#) we could stay with our friend Graeme whom we hadn't seen since he visited us 6 years ago in Costa Natura. He lives now with Donna and her daughter Grace. After coming back from a 16 year round the world trip, he now owns Vagabond Backpackers in the city centre. It was nice to see him again and we exchanged lots of traveller tales. Only twice we went to the city centre which was pretty charming.

But because it was both times on a weekend, many people where out on a pub-crawl and it become even more obvious, that New Zealanders have a serious drinking problem. Even after the streets gets quit again, broken glass can be seen as remaining witnesses everywhere, as it is a habit all over New Zealand to throw empty bottles on to the road, be it in the countryside or in the towns.

Another day, Brigitte got even two birthday surprises. Because Heinz had asked Graeme to sneak with a birthday present for her out of the supermarket where the three of us were shopping, he and Donna later also organized a beautiful birthday cake that delighted Brigitte very much.

After 5 days we continued to [Akaroa](#), a popular weekend destination on the Banks Peninsula . As French originally settled it, most street names and many restaurants and shops still had French names. What was on offer, was (unfortunately) mainly Kiwi style. Never mind, we now had managed to get a 3 day reservation at "[Le Bons Bay Backpackers](#)" that is famous for its communal gourmet style dinners. It's kind of amazing that

the owner Gary, who already cooked meals for his other uncountable guests and us 13 years ago, still enjoys doing it and even improved his skills so much, all Backpackers in New Zealand talk about it. A maximum of 17 people can stay here and normally all of them sit down on the big table to enjoy the food from the 6-8 exquisite gourmet platters that all come freshly prepared onto the table. Washing up of dishes is done by the guests who continue chatting to each other all evening, sitting around the log fire thereafter. Also during the day this was the best we could do, as the weather became foggy and drizzly. Autumn had definitely started and this weekend summer daylight-saving time had been abolished.

Pineglades Naturist Club

Still, the forecast promised a couple of sunny days and so we took the opportunity and booked at [Pineglades Naturist Club](#) in Christchurch. This place was again in the midst of an urbanized area and here the gate even remained open day and night. This club didn't look like a campground, but rather like a small village with lots of neat little houses with a small campground in the centre. Quite a number of people lived here permanently and although the club can look back on 50 years of history, many things looked new and very well maintained. There was a very modern and big clubhouse, a separate building with sauna and a huge spa pool. Further, somebody opened a kiosk selling ice cream and snacks. The members were very active on the sports-fields. Many tended wonderful gardens, not only around their own house, but had created an arboretum and a beautifully landscaped stone-garden with fountains for all to enjoy.

After spending the first night in a small cabin, we couldn't resist the temptation to move into what the club called the "big bach" (Maori name for hut). It only cost \$ 10 more and this was now a proper house with lounge; kitchen and separate bedroom, there were beds for 6 people but no bathroom inside. Despite a cold wind and the average temperature being only about 13° C degrees, it felt sizzling hot sunbathing on our sheltered terrace. After 5 days at Pineglades, we left with more suntan than we could had expected, at this time of the year.

By continuing along the inland scenic way south, we passed many farms and only a few still bred sheep. New Zealand has changed: also cattle, deer, ostrich's and the latest fashion: [Alpacas](#) are now common. Alpacas are relatives of lamas and especially "life-styler", often immigrants, favours them. In case this trend hasn't swept Europe as yet, we explain that these are usually 40-50 year old drop-outs that usually had held quite successful jobs but now they prefer to think about their life quality and prefer to take an easier task and change to a new life style - whatever that may be. This has become so much of a fashion; it generated a new business all in its own. Because many of them prefer to find a house in the countryside, real estate agents sometimes now advertise properties by simply writing on their signs "lifestyle for sale" ... This can mean they try to cash an old farm for good money, as many of the new "drop out's" are quite well off.

South Island: Lake Tekapo & Mt. Cook

We stopped in [Geraldine](#), a small village that was quite touristy. Buses to Mount Cook usually stopped here to give the "package crowd" the unique opportunity to find the rarest souvenir in the country. As we reached Burkes Pass the next day, we drove into sunny weather, as the clouds stuck on one side of the pass which is apparently very common. Soon we reached [Lake Tekapo](#), which we could enjoy in its beautiful blue colour with autumn trees lining its shore.

We stayed at Kay and Brian's place named Aoraki Naturally, just 17 km further on. As they have contributed many articles to the English "Naturist Life" magazine, just as we did, Kay welcomed us, as if she had known us for years. Having read many of her articles, we felt the same. This place was situated in the middle of a "hot pan". The pan's floor was actually a high plateau surrounded by mountains. It was a very barren and dry land and often when we woke up it was foggy or cloudy. By 11 o'clock, the sky had become clear and the air warmed up. We could sunbathe in view of the last clouds



that now looked like frozen waterfalls stuck on the side of the mountains. The sun felt really warm on our skin but after sunset it got ice cold almost immediately.

We rented a room in a former shed and there was a kitchen and lounge with a log fire in another one. One evening, it was quite late, when suddenly two parties of Backpackers arrived, after they hadn't found any other accommodation, due to some canoe-event. As all 4 left before the fog lifted the next morning, they didn't even get a chance...

Aoraki Naturally was closing down soon, as Kay and Brian are going to open a new naturist resort called [Wai Natur](#) near sunny Blenheim around October 2006.

We wanted to make an excursion to Mount Cook, and Brian advised us which day to pick. Apparently, visibility is not often very good, and if he can see the mountain from the house, time is right - there might be no second chance soon. So, we were lucky and admired New Zealand's highest peak [Aoraki / Mt. Cook](#) (3754m) already as we approached it. It was towering behind Lake Pukaki that was filled with glacier water and was reflecting together with other snow-capped peaks. Located at the end of the road, was a settlement named Mt. Cook that only consisted of tourist infrastructure.

We hiked up to a viewpoint over Tasman glacier, which looked magic in the last sunlight. The ice of the glacier tongue was not really visible as it was almost covered by gravel. On the glacier lake, however, some floating icebergs reflected a bluish light.

South Island: picturesque South-East-Coast

Heading back to the east coast, we followed the very scenic Waitaki River valley. On this river, a giant hydro-electric project with 6 dams had been realized, so we followed the blue water lined with golden autumn leaves till we reached [Oamaru](#). There were various places, where penguins could be observed coming ashore before dawn. We had the chance to see several of the endangered [yellow eyed penguin](#) hopping up the rocky beach on their way to feed their waiting chicks. There were many observation shelters/viewing hides strategically placed on promising locations.



Another special sight were the [Moeraki Boulders](#); big round stones on the beach of Moeraki. At high tide, most were covered by water, whereas at low tide, they were all laying exposed. They could measure between 40-300 cm in diameter and were the glued reminders of sea-decay, often showing a kind of seam in quartz that held the hollow interior together, as we could see of those that had broken open. Why they are round, we didn't quite understand - maybe YOU find it out in the [scientific](#) explanation on the website, und tell us in simple terms ...

Shortly before Dunedin, the hills that had been very dry up until here, suddenly became green. In this town, we got a somehow special room in a Backpackers hostel. It had a 2 by 3 meters big and 1 m high podium on which a couch had been placed. From there, we had a superb view down to the hilly city. [Dunedin](#) was a sweet city, not only because Cadbury's factory was in the middle. Lots of old Victorian stone buildings gave this university town a charming character and there were many ethnic restaurants offering tasty food at student prices.

Only 60 km down the road, we stayed at Happy Inn Backpackers, run by Tony, a Swiss drop-out. He shared his alternative lifestyle with his guests (probably more labour than Alpacas). He let them have organic vegetables from his garden, baked bread in a wood stove and gave lessons in Tai-Chi, Yoga or juggling. He renovated and created much of the hostel by himself, as for example the one room he made look like a rustic Swiss alp hut. The most special thing was a former iron steam tank, which he converted into a very original sauna. Very unusual for New Zealand, this sauna could be used in the buff and as Tony liked it to be full, when he heated it up, he usually invited also a few European neighbours if he didn't have enough guests. The best of all was that Tony washed the dishes of everybody; doing your own dishes was strictly forbidden! He believed in the Buddhist Philosophy and often if he argued whether man should be eating meat or not eat anything at all, we were not sure if that was what he believed in, or whether he just wanted to be provocative in order to start a discussion.

Along gravel roads, we ventured out to discover the here very green hills along the Catlins coast, where cows and sheep were grazing (we didn't see alpacas anymore). At [Curio Bay](#) we stayed at a very new Hostel, superbly situated right on the beach. It had only one five-bed dorm and two Doubles. Seals and schools of the rare Hector Dolphins could regularly be seen, sometimes without even leaving the house. On the other side of the peninsula, only 10 min. walk away, some more 'yellow eyed penguins' could be seen coming ashore before dawn.

After three days we continued to [Invercargill](#) on the South Island's southern tip. Many people said it was an ugly town, but we felt it wasn't so bad. We found some nice buildings and also the Bluff further south with its view-point had some nice scenery, although it was quite industrialized.

South Island: beautiful Fjordlands

Following the tourist drive [southern scenic route](#), which led along the shore until it turned inland after 60 km, we slowly approached the mountains. After passing Lake Manapouri, we reached [Te Anau](#) on the lake of the same name. As this is the gateway to the [Fjordland National Park](#), there was a fortune to be made in selling souvenirs, providing food and accommodation to the happy tourists. Most of the places to stay enjoyed lake views and the main road of the village was lined with restaurants and shops. From here it was 120 km along a very scenic road out to [Milford Sound](#), the main attraction of the area. We were very lucky to see it on a sunny day, because most days it is raining; 6000 mm (6 M!) is their annual average blessing of rain (east of this mountains it's only about 330mm). The fjord is cut out deep from the high mountains and the vegetation is of course, incredibly green. Moss seemed to cover everything, in places even the middle of the sealed road. Dozens of streams run down from every mountain, that mostly were already snow capped now in mid April. There were clear mirror-lakes and tumbling waterfalls that had carved out big round holes in the rocks. Most tourists also enjoyed a boat trip out to the fjord and everyone had to picture the majestic Mitre Peak, if they got a chance to see it.

Queenstown & Wanaka: touristy Mountain-idyll

We left to [Queenstown](#), which has developed to become a look-alike St. Moritz. A bit cheaper still, but with an international airport that is also being called at by cheap airlines, so it was not exclusively for superrich jet-setters. The scenery with lake and mountains was really breathtaking, but most people had come here for another reason: action-sports! In Queenstown, the "super-active" adrenaline junkies found lots of possibilities to spend lots of money. Jet-boating, white water rafting and tandem-skydiving were long established, as was the still most popular activity of jumping off a bridge or gondola.

To increase the chance that these tough Masochists could pay for a 2nd and 3rd jump, the Bungy operators fixed a latex rubber cord around their customer's ankles before they jumped. Years ago, they offered the \$ 130-200.- kick for free to those who didn't hesitate to jump in the nude, but as too many budget conscious backpackers lost their inhibitions in the face of such a saving, they stopped the promotion. Many adventure sports had actually been invented here and some have now been established all around the globe. Queenstown was also New Zealand's party capital and as in the rest of the country, most party-goers needed a party-pill in order to have fun.



It was now the Easter weekend and according to the national news, a famous Kiwi actress worried a lot because her boyfriend decided to go skydiving, whereas the rest of the nation was in shock because petrol prices rose another 6 cents to NZD 1.699 p.lit. for unleaded (Euro 0.88). But all this suffering wasn't enough to reduce the Easter traffic. It seemed that everyone was heading to the southern Alps during the holidays and therefore the Backpacker's accommodation were suddenly packed again. Not only the locals, but also ten thousands of foreign students were now travelling around and all had made reservations in the hostels beforehand. So, we had to phone around quite a bit, till we got places to stay during the next 3 weeks.

Continuing through mountain valleys sparkling in beautiful autumn colours, we briefly visited the charming village of Arrowtown, before heading to [Wanaka](#). The scenery around this village was equally pretty, but it was

much smaller and quieter than Queenstown. Tourism was also the main income here and in winter they both represent the main skiing areas. Many wealthy "life stylers" had their luxury villas in the hills along lake Wanaka.

During the five days we were there, we wore down our hiking boots quite a bit in this fascinating landscape, either by walking along the lake or up Mount Iron (559 M above sea level).

Just as we were going to leave to the west coast, the owner of the "Purple Cow Backpacker's", informed us that the road over Haast-Pass had been closed due to a mud slide. So we had to check-in again and as the hostel was still fully booked, we only could get a room to ourselves once somebody on the other side of the Haas Pass had cancelled their reservation. Instead of waiting, we made another beautiful 4 hours walk along the lake.

The next day, as we could get past Haast Pass we saw how a tiny river had covered 300m of road with big rocks and mud. As soon as we came to the other side, the vegetation changed dramatically and we came into dense green rainforest. We stopped quite often, as there were many walking tracks through moss-clad forest. Once down on the west coast, we stayed in the village of **Haast**, from where we went on a side trip to Jackson Bay, together with three Swedish girls from the hostel. They usually travelled by bus, so they were quite delighted to get off the main road for once. We stopped in various places with nice forest walks, but unfortunately the crested penguins didn't come to the rendez-vous. Instead, we were rewarded by most beautiful sunset colours reflecting on the hills.

South Island: glaciers along the West-Coast

Our next destination was [Fox Glacier](#). It was possible to walk up the valley, right to the glacier tongue and the

bluish ice was an impressive sight. The next morning, we walked around little [Lake Matheson](#) that reflected the snow capped mountains in the background, now the clouds were gone. The path through this dense forest along the lake was very beautiful in itself and we admired many plants that were decorated by raindrops from last night that were now glittering in the sun.



Only 25 km north of the first glacier, was a very similar one: [Franz Josef Glacier](#). The Austrian explorer Julius Haast named it after the Austrian Emperor in 1865, whereas "Fox" was named after New Zealand's prime Minister who visited in 1872. Presently, both glaciers were receding, but not so long ago, they had been moving forward up to 5 meters per day for a while, which is ten times faster than glaciers in the Swiss Alps.

Again we walked up to the ice from below, but many people went for guided glacier walks or scenic flights by helicopters, so the air was constantly humming.

By the time we reached the tourist accommodation centre of **Franz Josef Glacier**, it was still packed with tourists, but this was now the last place where we had to phone several hostels until we got accommodation in a double-room.

great Backpackers-Hostels

From [Hokitika](#), our next stop, we travelled very slowly again, as the area of the West coast was literally dotted with small and charming backpacker's places again. So many had been recommended to us, that we stopped much more often than "necessary" to complete our sightseeing program.

In Hokitika, the village was more charming than we had expected and the brand new hostel named "Bird song", was decorated with huge and stylish paintings of birds.

Next, we stayed at "[Global Village Backpackers](#)" in **Greymouth**. This was the most tastefully decorated place we've stayed at and even though with 40 beds it had been one of the bigger places we've slept at in New Zealand, it had a very good atmosphere. The owners were a couple in their fifties, she a Japanese and he a Kiwi, who had travelled all over the world and the hostel had become a museum of their souvenirs. In every room, including the bathrooms, they had put silk paintings, batik's, wooden masks, statues and lots more and the outside areas were just as tastefully decorated. Also functional items like carpets, tables, cupboards or hangers were often imported handcrafted items. The hostel was by the river and it had also nice outdoor sitting areas, sauna, gym and a spa pool. They let their guests use bicycles and kayaks plus fishing rods for free and if that wasn't enough, the owners distributed fresh muffins every evening. There were no other reasons why anybody would want to hang around Greymouth. In no other town we had seen so many ramshackle and run down houses with backyards that looked like rubbish dumps or accumulations of scrap iron, but people were still living there. Somehow it reminded us a little bit of third world countries, where even backpackers live in luxury compared to the poor locals.



At the hostel we talked to one of two Swiss guys who had been rescued by helicopter. It was reported on TV and was another good example how the media made a major headline out of a minor incident. The two had climbed the rocks on the side of a glacier behind the barrier. As it suddenly started raining, the glacier-milled rocks became enormously slippery. His friend couldn't get a grip and slid down 30 meters, breaking a leg. The media reported that he had fallen 150 m down and that they had attempted to climb barefoot. It was just not reported that they had removed their hiking boots to find out whether they would have a better grip with their bare feet on the wet rocks. Further, the New Zealand news channel told that the two unfortunate adventurers wore shorts and T-shirts but didn't mention that they also wore jumpers and jackets. Nobody on TV mentioned what puzzled the Swiss most: why a rescue helicopter had first to be ordered from the east-coast, and none of the "sight-seeing" humming birds - about 15 in that area, were equipped with a winch to lift injured people up. One presumptuous journalist got entry to the hospital room of the guy with the broken leg, pretending he was a friend. In New Zealand's gossip society, Paparazzi bother not only the rich and famous!

We travelled to the northern end of the West Coast road, a bit further up than Karamea, where we visited the [Oparara Basin](#). It was an area of limestone formations and caves and after hiking through beautiful rainforest, we reached several natural arches. One was almost like a giant tunnel: 200m long and 90m wide, with a ceiling 37m above us. A river run through another arch that had more of a cave feeling, as there were stalactites hanging down over the orange coloured riverbed.

Our accommodation was situated on a hill in a forest clearing high above the sea. To reach it, we had to walk for 15 minutes between the trees, but we didn't need to carry our backpacks up, as the hostel owner carried our 50 kg luggage (mostly food) on his 4x4 Quad-bike up the hill on the narrow track.

Now we had seen all of the beautiful rugged west coast, but as we were so fascinated by this dense rainforest, we didn't want to leave as yet, because inland it wouldn't look as green anymore. We remembered that wonderful house in the middle of the Nikau palms and tree ferns, we had recently seen on an advertisement folder of a backpackers brochure and it really looked alike the house where we had stayed with some friends we had made on our last trip 14 years ago. We were curious to find out whether it now belonged to the "[Nikau Retreat Backpacker's](#)" near the Pancake Rocks and so we decided to check it out. The hostel rented out rooms in several buildings dotted around the rainforest, and the owner let us choose between two of them. But then we saw it, almost hidden by trees and it was neither of the proposed two houses. As "off season" had started, guests were brought together in two other buildings. However, after hearing our story, Hamish, the very nice owner who was also a travel guide author, interrupted that houses' hibernation especially for us and let us stay there again. We loved it and let our memories come alive.

We had a great evening, as the reception sent two very interesting guys over to stay in that house as well.

One was a traveller from Switzerland and the other was a famous hiker who called himself "Kingston Flyer". We had met him already 9 days ago in Haast. He offers re-location of cars for people who want to hike the 5 day Heaphy Track, driving them almost 500km along a big detour to the other end of the North Western part of the South Island. He then runs back along the Heaphy track in two days only, returning the car keys to the hikers as he meets them along the way. Having heard about his "business" beforehand, we had imagined he would be a muscly 30 year old; but this skinny and sinewy little man was close to 70! Presently he was just walking the 1'200 km length of the South Island. Who thinks old people are frail? In comparison to him, anybody complaining about sore muscles is a softie!



In the morning, we gained strength from the best bread we have ever bought in New Zealand and surely it hadn't been baked by a Bakery but by the Backpacker's. That day we went on a 4 hours walk along some small river through more rainforest, which was very pleasant, except: suddenly the track disappeared in another much wider river almost at the end of the loop. After hesitating for a while, we took our shoes off and braved the cold water, that wasn't very deep at least. From there, it wasn't very far to the beach and all around us we started seeing multi-layered rocks, sometimes as an exposed rock face or as washed out pillars. Now we were very near the pancake rocks, which we visited along the way again.

South Island: between Nelson and the Farewell-Spit

The next day we took the inland route towards Nelson-Golden Bay. As the weather had become quite a bit warmer again during the days (~17°), we decided to go to [Nelson Sun Club](#) in Upper Moutere for a few days. There was not even a gate where we entered and it felt like a little hamlet with several full-size houses on a hillside. This club had about 15 permanent residents and there were 5 rooms for rent in a club house. During the day it felt nice and warm when we sunbathed on the wind sheltered veranda, but at night it was difficult to heat the big house with the small wood oven. The members used their inventive skills and heated all water with wood; shower and jacuzzi - only the washing machine was left running with cold water, as common Down Under.



Of our trip, the only missing leg was the area around the Golden Bay, so we drove up to **Collingwood**. From there we ventured out to see the 24km long sandbar called [Farewell Spit](#) vanish in the mist as it was like a long but very narrow peninsula.

In rather stormy weather and fighting against very very strong wind, we also went down to [Wharariki Beach](#) that fascinated us with numerous caves and rock arches. As the rain eased and the sun appeared, we wanted to take pictures, but for the first time our digital camera went on strike. As soon as we were back on the carpark, this thing worked again. There was another couple braving the elements of that rock holes and stone arch beach and by coincidence we met them again on the carpark of another attraction the next day. They told us, that the same strange thing had happened to their camera and now we are not sure whether Wharariki Beach is some enigmatic mystery place or whether these modern electronic toys can't stand modest 120km/h winds.

What we were now looking at, were amongst the clearest springs of the Southern Hemisphere. [Pupu Springs](#) throw up to 14'000 lt./sec. to the surface and thanks to a mirror placed below and above the water on a platform, it was possible to observe the purity of this element even better.

We also ventured on side roads into the northern and southern part of [Abel Tasman National Park](#), where we made some short loop-hikes over and along golden sandy inlets. As the water in the bays was very shallow, it created wonderful patterns of sandy islands, or became completely dry in big areas during low tide.

Throughout the country, the Department of Conservation had created an extensive network of hiking paths, which are very well maintained. They often incorporate viewing platforms, boardwalks and impressive swing bridges, making the country's most beautiful parts accessible to hikers even in remote areas. With a simple plastic- or wire-grid laid over wooden boardwalks or bridges, they made sure everybody had a good grip even in wet conditions - a clever invention.



We didn't plan it, but from Takaka, where we had stayed the night before, it was only a short drive to **Mapua**, where we decided to stay the next night. It fell exactly on the 13.05.06, the date of our 7th travel anniversary and you remember that we wrote earlier on, how Mapua had been the decision-making point for this trip. To celebrate, we booked a table in the gourmet restaurant Flax, where we got the finest food and highest bill we ever had in New Zealand.

Back to Auckland

Exactly here we also completed our roundtrip around the country and looking back, we have once more had an interesting trip. On the North Island, we were mainly impressed by the volcanic areas, whereas the South Island's most exciting sight for us, had been the fjordlands and the rainforests. As there were so many charming little Backpacker's hostels, travelling has been very comfortable and enjoyable. We also realized that New Zealand had remained a bit backward in many respects, but often in a charming way, as an English traveller remarked. Things were not as hectic and people were not that much running after the money all the time, as they often do in Europe.

Already before we had arrived in Nelson, we had put an add for our car into a local paper. Only two hours after we had checked into the "Green Monkey Hostel", somebody rang and came by to look at our Ford Telstar. Even though the person was very interested, the deal didn't materialize, as he couldn't get enough money for his old car. As we didn't get any other phone calls, we decided to try our Good Luck somewhere else. First we considered Christchurch, but as we heard this town was currently flooded with travellers trying to sell their cars, and as the weather forecast predicted snow for that city, we argued that Auckland has so much more population, our chances of finding a local buyer would probably be much better up there. On the internet we placed an add in Auckland's "Trade & Exchange" Paper and on their website and then rushed the 800 km stretch up there in only 1½ days.

As soon as we drove off the ferry in Wellington, we got a call on our mobile phone from somebody who was interested in seeing the car. As it got dark shortly after 5 p.m. now, we drove on well into the night. We stayed overnight in an old school-hostel all by ourselves. As we were too restless to sleep well, we got up again at 5:30 a.m. and continued our marathon. By 7 o'clock the rising sun reflected wonderful colours on the clouds over the Ruapehu/Tongariro volcanoes and we now saw small patches of snow left on the roadside. Up here and along Lake Taupo, the ground was frozen and on a petrol station we learned that parts of the National highway Nr. 1 had been closed a few days ago because of heavy snowfall.

However, we could now continue our way in beautiful sunshine and we reached Auckland at 13:30 h on Friday, May 19, 2006. Here temperatures were considerably warmer than on the South Island, especially at night when they remained at around 12°C instead of 3°C and the days that were up to 20°C warm instead of only 15°C in Nelson, the South Island's warmest spot.

Looking back to our 3 summer months on the North Island (Nov.-Feb.) and our 3 autumn months on the South Island (Mar.-May), it was surprising that we encountered so much more sunny weather on the South Island where it had rained very seldom only and if,



then mostly during the night. It was also surprising that February and March were much cooler than April and May.

In [Auckland](#) we checked into Bamber Hostel, because they had a carpark. Of the 15 cars there, half bore signs in their windows "for sale". Some had apparently reduced their price by more than half - especially those with sleeper-vans. The next morning, all of us moved down to Auckland's City Car Fair in the hope to find a buyer for their vehicles. The atmosphere was now completely different to November, when masses of prospective buyers outnumbered the cars for sale by far. Now there were lots of cars for sale and almost nobody browsing to buy. The biggest section on the car fair was filled with sleeper-vans in any price range: 25 minibuses, about 15 small cars; station wagons and sedans in the price range "below \$ 3'000" and only one in the section "over \$ 3'000": ours! Despite all this, the people who had phoned us when we had left the ferry, rang again around 9 o'clock and soon thereafter they were inspecting our beauty, taking her on a test drive. Could you believe that this was one of very few cars that changed ownership that morning? We got paid \$ 3'200 for it, which was only \$ 100 less than what we had paid: quite a bargain for a 6 months "car rental". Those with sleeper vans had much more problems to get rid of them, because now it was too cold for camping. Often the owners had to let them go as cheap as chips, even though they had paid up to \$ 5'500 for close to 20 years old vans with up to 400'000 km. We were soooo lucky and for the rest of the day we were just HAPPY.

The next day we started worrying again, because we had a VERY big problem to solve: where to go next and after that, in which order and with which airline and we needed to find a travel agent that was able to book it at the cheapest price. After three days of brain storming, checking on the internet and bothering travel agents, we were even happier. We had now booked three tickets, two of them on the internet, as New Zealand travel agents were not able to book flights out of another country, but their small islands. Never the less, they had us sign a disclaimer form confirming that they advised us not to enter Asia on a one-way ticket as an onward flight would be mandatory - preferably to Switzerland...

Ten days later, on June 3, 2006, we will have started a new trip, which brings us first from Auckland to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and then to Singapore, where we will spend one week each. After that we will fly to Koh Samui/Koh Pagan, where we want to relax and prepare ourselves for a new continent: on July 20 we shall fly to Africa. There, we'd like to discover South Africa and Namibia in the following weeks or months. Depending on how long it will take till we're satisfied by seeing enough animals or; if worst comes to worst; till the animals are satisfied with us... We guess it's a totally new world down there and according to the guidebook it all sounds ever so exciting! We are looking forward to experiencing new adventures.

Brigitte & Heinz



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