

## Day 1: Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2012

Today Robyn and I set off on holidays returning to New Zealand for the first time since our honeymoon in August 1974 when we travelled the North Island in a campervan, an old Bedford but a world of memories. After 32 years we expect New Zealand to change somewhat, but apart from the visit to Auckland, the Bay of Islands and Waiheke, the majority of our holiday will be on the South Island.

Neither Robyn nor I could sleep soundly as we both knew that our alarms would be sounding at 4:30am to signal the start of what will be a very long day, especially with New Zealand being 2 hours ahead of time. Although the evening before we had both packed and weighed our bags to ensure they were under the 23Kg allowed by Qantas in economy, we still had our last minute essentials to go into our bags. After breakfast when both of us were ready David climbed out of bed ready for the trip to the Brisbane International Airport. At that time on a Saturday morning most sensible people are still in bed and so the traffic was light and uneventful all the way to the airport.

We were somewhat surprised when David wanted us to park the car so he come in to the departure lounge and coffee with us before we disappeared below to go through customs. Usually David doesn't want to venture into public with his parents so we didn't want to pass up this opportunity to have coffee and a chat. Coffee over it was time to say our goodbyes to David and head to the customs and to the boarding gate just in time to board QF123 for the 3 hour 20 minute flight to Auckland.



The plane wasn't totally full so Robyn and I had a spare seat in the three seat row. Relaxed we sat back, had a light lunch and watch 'Salmon fishing in Yemen', a great movie. The flight was uneventful and before long we had started our decent into Auckland banking over the city and landing from the south.

The weather in Auckland was perfect with clear skies and sunny, a perfect way to start our holidays. Sometimes you just have to love technology, especially being an Australian passport holder with the electronic chip. Placing your passport open photo page down on the scanning device was a quick way to get your clearance printout before heading through customs. The only thing the customs man was interested in was our sneakers and asked questions about being on a farm. Having satisfied his curiosity we escaped though the glass doors with our duty free alcohol and bags heading to the ticket office to catch the blue AirBus into downtown Auckland City.

The 45 minute bus ride via Eden Park Road took us through a variety of accommodation style from the very palatial to what could be classed as cramped, low socio-economic subsistence dwelling, maybe I have become a little to accustom to our big home amongst the trees, the birds, lawn and space between houses, the peace and quiet as well as little traffic.



Hopping off the bus at stop 5 in Queen Street right opposite the Mercure Windsor Hotel was convenient meaning all we had to do was cross the road and into the hotel. This is an older style hotel, the other Mercure is a little more modern but we chose those one because of its character.



Having stowed away our gear we headed out into the cool of the afternoon for a bit of sightseeing. We headed down at the ferry terminal and on to the Viaduct where the luxury yachts and power vessels wait either to be hired for sailing, fishing or sightseeing trips or the owners simply tie up because they can afford to and show off their luxurious sail and stink boats. The weather in Auckland was mild and slightly overcast no need for big jackets and winter thermals.

A new feature since I was in Auckland in 2008 was a drawbridge joining Viaduct north and south. As we stood and wondered how it worked the alarms sounded, lights flashed and the electronic gates closed as the two large walkways opened up like the London Tower Bridge to allow a boat to pass between the two raised sections of the bridge. But where was the boat? As we looked around a whale watching boat came in through the entrance and headed for the draw bridge passing through at around 5 knots. I reckon the boat skipper has a remote control like the garage door as it was totally automated and before long the draw bridge had closed provided a walkway across the entrance to the north end of the Viaduct.

The north side is still all new but you can see that the dining features of the south side will continue wending its way between the boat builders like Team New Zealand America's Cup headquarters and other luxury boat builders and re-fitting yards, no tinnies stored here. We called into a fish market to have a look at their fresh fish but to our disappointment the smell and the sunken eyes on some of the fish signalled to us that it wasn't all that fresh. Robyn couldn't stand the smell so took off into the shopping area while I walked around seeing the types of fish available to the customer. With the time starting to get late we walked up town looking for a bite to eat. Well the only thing we could find on this Queens Birthday long weekend that was to our taste was the fast food court at the cinema. It appeared to us the majority of food outlets cater for Indian and Asian cuisine.

Settling on our pizza and chips (very health indeed) we headed back to our hotel to wash our weight watchers delight down with a couple of glasses of scotch (Tony) and brandy (Robyn). Surprisingly the food tasted okay but maybe because of the lingering taste of the Qantas food in our taste buds. Since we had to be outside the hotel for a 6:40am pickup to join the tour to the Bay of Islands the next morning both of us set our alarms and drifted off into dream land.

Before settling in for the evening we thought we had better go and get some food for breakfast as they don't serve breakfast in the hotel until 6:30am. So we headed back up town looking for the Countdown supermarket to purchase some crumpets, orange and mango fruit juice, margarine, a bottle of jam and a container of drinking water. Besides, the television leaves a lot to be desired, couldn't even watch the league or catch up on the footie scores. Never mind, this was our first day on holidays and that wasn't a priority.