

Day 2: Sunday 3rd June 2012

The alarm sounds and we are up and at it making breakfast so we wouldn't be late for the 6:25am shuttle bus pickup to take us to the Sky City Bus terminal where our Great Sights Bay of Islands 'Discover the Bay' Fullers tour commenced.

Heading north the bus driver kept us amused and interested as he rattled off facts, figures, jokes and tales and in his words, "about 90 percent of it is true". In his younger days he was a sign writer before taking up driving bus tours in Australia and New Zealand and had the personality to get on with everyone. As the bus headed north the sun started to come out and we could see the clouds had thinned and the weather was going to be sunny and perfect after the overnight showers.



Along the highway we took a detour off the main road heading up a country lane to see the 800 year old McKinney Kauri that has a girth of 7.62m. The Kauri tree was once used for boat building because it had no knots but these days are a protected species. Most souvenirs today you buy in the shops are 'swamp Kauri' reclaimed from the swamps which have preserved the wood but is very expensive to buy.



There was one stop along the way for coffee and something to eat, but apart from that travelling north of Auckland takes you through some interesting variety of country side, lush forest areas, open farmland, housing, indoor snow skiing centre, small towns, industrial and commercial industries, oil refinery, pine forestry and logging but one thing is common, everything is green and the grass is lush.

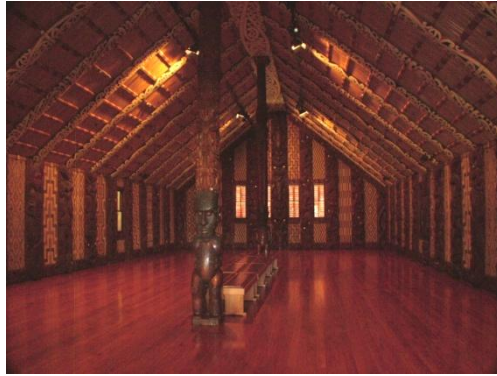
As we go close to Paihia where our cruise boat departed the bus driver explained that those not going to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds would be given their cruise tickets before they left the bus while those going on the Waitangi tour had to be back at the bus by 11:50am. Paihia is steeped in history like all the other towns in the district and is the ferry departure terminal for all the islands that make up the bay of islands as well as the ferry across to Russell.



Robyn and I enjoyed our personal guided tour as the other two people who were supposed to be on the tour failed to turn up at the bus on time so the bus left without them.



There are too many highlights to repeat here about the history behind the treaty, Captain Cook, the British and the French, the Maori chiefs, the Christian mission stations, Captain William Hobson, Reverend Henry Williams, James Busby, Lord and Lady Bledisloe, the naval flagstaff and the three flags, and Russell, the 'hell-hole of the Pacific'. Of significance is the signing of the Declaration of Independence of New Zealand in 1835 and the continuing disputes between the English and Maori versions of the Treaty of Waitangi. To find out more either visit the website www.waitangi.net.nz or better still, visit this historical site yourself.



After about an hour our bus took us back to Paihia to join the Bay of Islands cruise. With the perfect sunny weather, slight swell and soft breeze blowing in our face we passed many points of interest including dolphins, sandy beaches, holiday resorts, camping areas, luxury homes, and the Cape Brett lighthouse on our way to the Motukokako or ‘Hole in the Rock’.



On our way we called into Russell to pick up more passengers and our bus driver hitched a ride so he could catch up with his sister who was holidaying at Russell over the long weekend. We had already purchased the lunch option so on board we handed in our voucher and was given brown paper bags with food and another voucher to hand in when we wanted a drink.



The tide was not favourable today with large swells coming through the hole making it too dangerous for the boat, so all we could do was to get as close as possible to the hole and take photos.



Another hole in the rock called the Cathedral is being formed and is about 60m long. Divers claim the hole has been breached but it will be a long time before the rock wears away to make a hole visible.

Getting back to Paihia around 4pm there was no time to waste as the bus had to leave straight away to be back in Auckland around 8pm. Thank goodness the bus driver switched off his microphone as it got dark so we could all take a nap, besides he told us all about the places on the way to Paihia.

Although we were scheduled to be dropped back at the hotel we decided to take a walk through Sky City casino and visit the tourist centre under the Sky Tower. Instead of going back to the food court we headed to 'Countdown' a shopping facility just like Woolworths, even uses the same symbol. A couple of frozen food packs, back to the hotel, pop them in the microwave and there is tea in 7 minutes per pack. Did it taste good? not really but it filled a hole in the stomach. With another full day planned for the next day we didn't stay up late but this time set our alarms for 7:30am, a more sensible hour to get up.