

Exploring New Zealand:

Two gals and a campervan

by Jodilee Harebottle and Michelle Crowley, *Things 2 Explore*



After four years of studying and three years of articles, we were finally two newly qualified CA(SA)s and decided it was time for something a bit different. We were up for some exploring and set off on a 30-week adventure. We put aside learning from books, and decided instead to see what the world had to teach us. Being the nerds we were at university, we had created a study log called "Things2learn" which included all the concepts we needed to remember and apply for exams. Now it was time for "Things2explore", and so our blog was born.

We started in Australasia, exploring some of Australia, Fiji and New Zealand before we headed on to Asia. Our travelling was done independently of organised tour groups. We spent just over three weeks in New Zealand, which was a whirlwind of out-of-this-world experiences, some of which we will share with you.

New Zealand: South Island

Franz Josef Glacier Heli-Hike

We had many incredible moments in New Zealand and our hike on a glacier was definitely one of them. After landing on the glacier in a helicopter, we leapt out and heard ice crunching underneath our feet as we made contact with the hard, slippery surface. We took small quick steps away from the helicopter while hunched close to the ground. The blades of the helicopter began spinning and we covered our faces as bits of ice were blown towards us. We stood up, took a deep breath in and admired the alien landscape around us. We could not believe that we were about to go hiking on a glacier. Franz Josef Glacier is New Zealand's fourth largest glacier and hiking on it was an extraordinary experience!

We trudged through the ice, walking a bit like cowboys in old American Western movies to ensure that our crampons (metal attachments with spikes on the bottom that are fitted to the bottom of boots to grip ice) bit into the ice, without puncturing our boots. The guides used the pick axes to turn the ice and snow as one would with soil, which is what we were more accustomed to seeing pick axes used for. Our helpful guides

also acted as barriers to protect us from the sheer drops at certain points during the hike.

One of our favourite parts of the hike was when we had to pass through a narrow opening between two towers made of the sparkling blue ice. We literally slid through the gap. It was exhilarating and the blue ice was exquisite. We felt like we were on another planet or at the very least in the popular children's movie, *Ice Age*. We also saw and heard rocks falling off a cliff above the glacier, which was somewhat terrifying!

About half way through we stopped for a bit of a break and a snack of chocolate we had brought with us. We love chocolate, and had not thought about the fact that it would freeze in our bags while on the glacier, but this was an unexpected and special treat – glacier-frozen chocolate!

Milford Sound

Another of New Zealand's treasures is Milford Sound, a fjord in the southwest of the South Island. Located in a UNESCO World Heritage site – Te Wahipounamu – it is known for its peaks, rainforests and waterfalls. We took an early morning cruise through Milford Sound and loved every second of it! The landscape is absolutely breathtaking and magnificent waterfalls cascade down the sides of sheer cliffs. The towering peaks are covered in rainforests while, in the distance, snow-capped mountains can be seen. The trees seem to cling to the sides of the mountains rising up from the sea and the water is inky black. During the entire cruise we had our mouths open in absolute awe of the raw beauty of our surroundings.





We were lucky enough to spot seals, dolphins and even a penguin for a moment! According to our guide, it is rare to see all three on a cruise. The chance of seeing the seals is quite high as they are usually found on "Seal Rock", but the dolphins and penguins require more luck.

Another highlight of the cruise around Milford Sound was the boat dipping underneath a waterfall. The water was freezing but it was worth it for the exhilaration. A myth fed to all tourists just as they are about to be splashed by freezing cold water is that the waterfall holds anti-aging properties, which perhaps gives some incentive to get a few drops of ice-cold water on your face!

Milford Sound stands out as one of the most enchanting places we have ever visited. Our photos and descriptions just do not do it justice.

New Zealand: North Island

Hot Water beach and Coromandel

One of our favourite days in New Zealand was the day we built our own natural jacuzzi and visited Narnia (aka Cathedral Cove).

Hot Water beach is magical, but it is all about timing! Its sand holds piping hot springs, but if you get there during high tide the perfect spot for your self-made jacuzzi will be covered in cool sea water. We woke up very early to make it there two hours before low tide. We sourced a good spot (you can actually feel the heat underneath the sand just by walking on it) and dug our jacuzzi. As we dug, out pumped

boiling hot water, so hot we had to mix in some of the cool sea water.

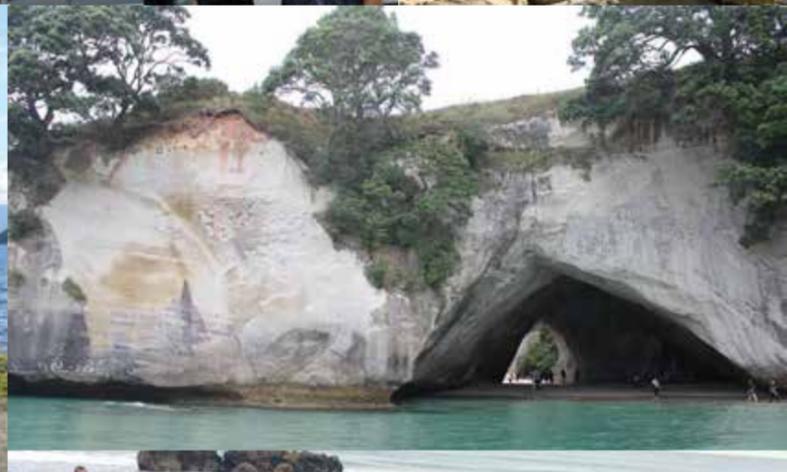
It became quite a social activity as we joined forces with our neighbours, who we suspected were jealous of our warm jacuzzi and managed to "accidentally" break down our wall. After the hard work of rebuilding we sat together in our (now much larger and slightly cooler) natural jacuzzi waiting for the tide to come in and break down our protective walls.

After our jacuzzi-making experience we visited Cathedral Cove. It is aptly named, with its beautiful cathedral-style arch. This was the spot where the children re-entered Narnia in the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*. The starting point to get there is Hahei, just a ten minute drive from Hot Water beach. There are two ways to get to this spot in "Narnia". Unfortunately unlike the Pevensie children in CS Lewis' stories, neither option is through a magical train station. Our options were a hike or a water taxi but despite the less romantic means of transport, arriving at this spot is still magical.

Cathedral Cove truly feels like another world with the cathedral-like arch connecting Mare's Leg Cove to Cathedral Cove. Each cove has its own interesting sand and rock formations.

Driving in New Zealand

New Zealand is such an exquisite country that even just driving around is an experience. We had so many amazing days driving between towns on beautiful passes, along the coast and stumbling onto countless enchanting walks and picturesque lakes. For this reason, we were very glad that we had hired a campervan to get around South Island and we



were lucky enough to be lent a car for a few days in North Island. We tried sleeping in the car for one night and while it served its purpose, we were very glad to have a campervan for our longer driving adventure.

Driving ourselves gave us the flexibility to just pull over and admire the scenery. Campervanning is huge in New Zealand and there are lots of campsites in spectacular locations. We stayed right on Lake Wanaka, giving us the perfect dinner spot outside our campervan with a view of the stunning lake and mountains as the sun set behind them. Some of our more remote campsites also had the most striking views of stars!

The thought of driving in New Zealand sounded scary at first, but it was such fun! Just be sure you have an offline GPS and soundtrack as the signal often stops working when you pass huge mountains. We found the roads generally quiet and especially so in South Island. The majority of the vehicles in South Island appeared to be campervans driven by tourists. In New Zealand they drive on the left-hand side of the road making it easier for us South Africans to adjust. However, the roads in New Zealand are very unlike our wide straight South African roads. We were surprised at how narrow and windy

they were, but driving in South Africa prepared us well, so do not let windy roads put you off – just allow for extra driving time to get to your destination.

The exploring continues

This is just a taste of our amazing experiences in New Zealand. When our time there was up we caught the world's longest flight – 17 hours from Auckland to Dubai. From Dubai we went to India, where we started our explorations of Asia. To find out more about our adventures and some useful travel tips, visit our website www.things2explore.online/, like our Facebook page (Things 2 Explore) or follow us on Instagram (things2explore).



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