



"This is historic Akaroa, just 75 kilometres from Christchurch. It's a charming seaside town with dramatic scenery and a relaxed easy-going vibe. On the right is a photo from Moeraki, 40km south of Oamaru. Huge spherical boulders formed about four million years ago, are scattered along the beach."



"We indulged in delicious crayfish (below) cooked at one of many roadside barbecues in Kaikoura and ate it alfresco beside the sea. On the left is Shantytown, near Greymouth, which is a heritage recreation of the old gold-rush days in New Zealand. You should allow at least half a day to visit it."



Northern sights, southern delights

Photographer **GARY BLAKE** talks us through his pictures from a 41-day motorhome tour of magnificent New Zealand

The Land of the Long White Cloud Aoterora its Maori name, stretched high above the length of the mighty Southern Alps. It was a truly magnificent sight

Landing in Christchurch Gary Blake and Wendy Johnson set off on a 41 day motorhome trip of New Zealand, planned for out of season autumnal bliss in April and May. An expat Kiwi with insider knowledge (albeit circa 1960) I was ready to show English Wendy around New Zealand, starting with South Island.

Had it changed? Six months of googling and we had two day-by-day itinerates, a 4 berth Maui motorhome to help us find out. First Christchurch – 'very English' with a River Avon and punting but it's suffered recent earthquakes. Then on to Dunedin (Scottish,) fiordlands of 'Norway; and adrenalin fuelled Queenstown and 'Middle Earth' in Peter Jackson films.

'Jurassic Park' hinterland and glaciers on the west coast with towering fern trees, gold rush settlements of Hokitika, Greymouth and the heritage park of Shantytown. Hot thermal pools at Hamner Springs, whale and seal watching in Kaikoura. Crayfish straight from the sea. What more could you want - other than wine from the region of Blenheim.

Yes the currency is decimalized, mileage now in kilometers, but they still drive on the left, people just as refreshingly friendly and the country still unspoiled. Freedom Camping possible and in DOC sites. We stayed in 'TOP 10' sites for convenience and ease of touring.



"We crossed the Haast Pass up to Franz Josef Glacier then took a helicopter flight and landed on Fox Glacier for 20 minutes (www.scenic-flights.co.nz). Then there was an easy walk to the foot of Franz Josef Glacier."



"This kea, New Zealand's native mountain parrot, paused just long enough in April's snowfall for me to grab this shot."



"Doubtful Sound was an overnight cruise (www.realjourneys.co.nz) with majestic peaks that tower hundreds of metres both above and below sea level, cascading waterfalls and pristine rainforest. It's undoubtedly the most spectacular of New Zealand's 15 fiord's. We saw Milford Sound (pictured) too (www.southerndiscoveries.co.nz) where we recommend visiting the Milford Discovery Centre and Underwater Observatory."



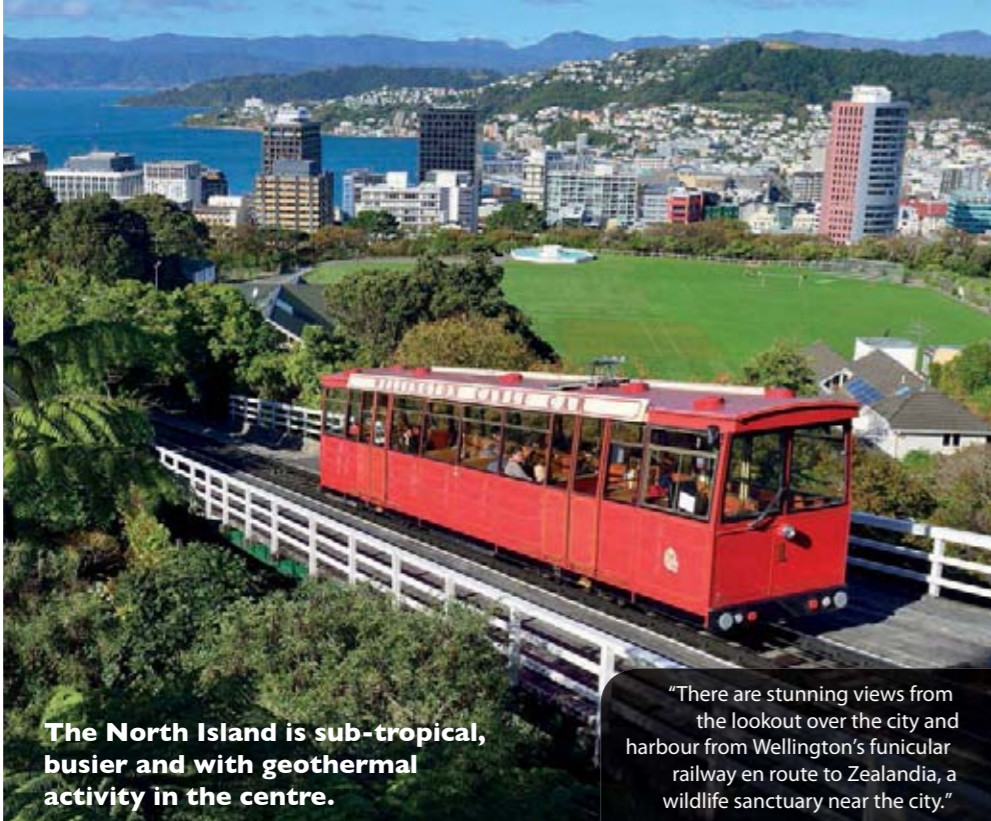
"We enjoyed a wine tasting excursion at the Cellar Door, Cloudy Bay Vineyard in Blenheim (www.cloudybay.co.nz)."



"Above is Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu seen from the town's Skyline Gondola with the Remarkables range behind. The surrounding Central Otago region is known for its Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards, and for adventure sports. We enjoyed the Shotover river trip (www.shotoverjet.com) and escaped the crowds on Queenstown's small boat lake cruise for the Mount Nicholas High Country Farm experience (www.southerndiscoveries.co.nz)."



"Kaikoura was one of Wendy's favourite places in the South Island – a bay with many fur seals basking on the beach close to you. Our tip is to join a whale watching trip to spot humpback whales (www.whalewatch.co.nz)."



The North Island is sub-tropical, busier and with geothermal activity in the centre.

"There are stunning views from the lookout over the city and harbour from Wellington's funicular railway en route to Zealandia, a wildlife sanctuary near the city."



"The elusive nocturnal kiwi is best seen at Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre. This little white kiwi called Manukura shares its space with another North Island brown kiwi called Turua."

Gary and Wendy travelled to New Zealand with the Club's Travel Service which can help you explore the country for yourself. The Club runs two escorted tours or can arrange bespoke travel. Head online to www.worldwidemh.co.uk/newzealand or call 024 7647 5340 for more information.



"We made sure to stop off at Coromandel Peninsula's Hot Water Beach where you can dig in the soft sand around low tide to bathe in its warm thermal water, free of charge."

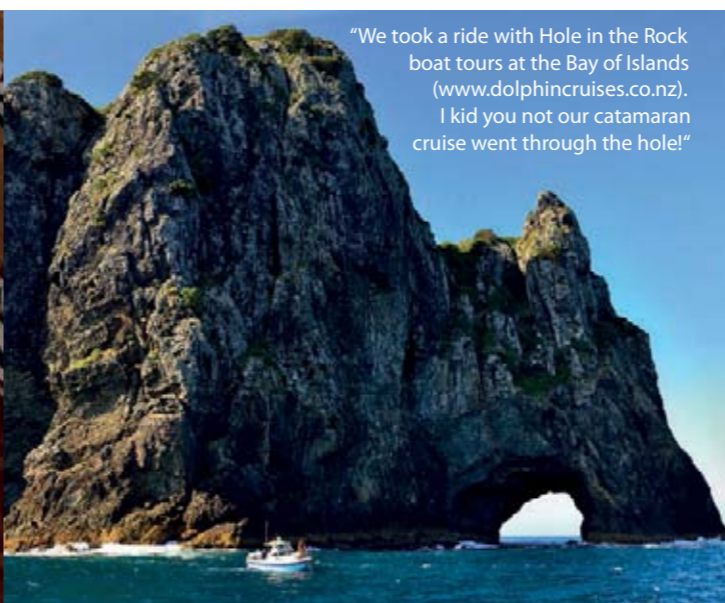


You can read more about Gary and Wendy's trip in Practical Motorhome magazine's February and March 2016 issues.

Here at last in Wellington after a 50 mile sea crossing. My home town, seat of government and famous as the 'windy' city but with a stunningly beautiful harbour where we stayed at the central Waterfront Motorhome Park. Then to Napier - the art deco town. At the beautiful Lake Taupo, an extinct volcano, we saw the cascading Huka falls on our way to the geyser's and hot pools and Rotorua - a cultural centre for the indigenous Maori people. Coromandel Peninsula with conical hills, sandy beaches and native bush is magical. So too is Hot Water Beach where at low tide you can dig into the soft sand and relax in the hot thermal water free of charge. Pohutukawa trees, known as the NZ Christmas tree due to their red flowers during December, frame the magnificent vistas around the vibrant city of Auckland, the 'city of sails'. To the Bay of Islands, also a sailing mecca and big game fishing for Kahawai, New Zealand's trout of the sea, Tuna and Blue Marlin. Beautiful coastal landscapes prevail right to Cape Reinga where two oceans collide. But on Northland's west coast in Waipoua Forest is the 2000 year old giant 'Tane Mahuta' New Zealand's largest known living Kauri tree. Spiritual to behold and only a short walk from the main road. In the Trounson Kauri Park a night walk lit by red torches looking for the nocturnal and shy Kiwi which proved just as elusive as ever. But the natural beauty was easy to find over the whole of New Zealand still unspoiled after my 40-year absence. Last call was the Cook Islands where we stayed on the tiny tropical island of Aitutaki with arguably the world's most stunning coral lagoon before catching the Air New Zealand flight back to the UK



"Rotorua is filled with bubbling mud pools, shooting geysers and natural hot springs, as well as being a showcase for New Zealand's fascinating Maori culture. Pictured is a cultural performance at Te Puia (www.tepuia.com)."



"We took a ride with Hole in the Rock boat tours at the Bay of Islands (www.dolphincruises.co.nz). I kid you not our catamaran cruise went through the hole!"



"You can wander along Wellington's waterfront to this pretty scene. It's one of the top ten Wellington 'must-do's' and was just a 30-minute stroll from our campsite (www.wmmp.co.nz/home). On the way it passes historical landmarks such as the Museum of New Zealand and waterfront cafés."



"Napier has a unique concentration of 1930s Art Deco architecture, built after much of the city was razed following a massive earthquake in 1931."