

10/25/2019

Hi,

Our tenth through twelfth day in New Zealand....

Day 10 (10/23/2019) – Today was our first full day in Christchurch. Due to our late arrival last night, we were allowed to sleep in this morning. We left 9:30 am for the International Antarctic Centre for a truly interesting experience. First we rode on the Hugglund Field Trip where we rode the trak vehicles used in the Antarctic through simulated areas; over ramps, across open gaps, across rubber tires simulating ice surfaces, etc. I was fortunate to be sitting in the front next to the driver, so I had a firsthand view of everything we went over. Esther and Joyce were in the rear with a lot of other travelers and were apparently falling all over each other. It was a fun experience.

Next we dressed in coats provided and went into the Storm Dome which simulated Antarctic snow storm. They dropped the temperature to minus 17 (F) and had winds up to 25 mph creating wind chill of near zero. We experienced this snow storm for about six minutes. Actually, not all that different than old Vermont weather.

Next we visited the Penguin Rescue where there were a lot of very small, not babies, just small Penguins. There was a woman in the area explaining about the Penguins and feeding them fish. Following that we sat in on a 4D movie with special glasses. The 4th dimension was, as things were happening in the film, we would feel the results; sprayed with water, jets of air on us, etc. It was very interesting.

Finally we walked through the Antarctic Gallery. The whole experience was well done. It turns out that most of the expeditions to Antarctic originate from Christchurch. If you would like more information about the International Antarctic Centre, check out <https://www.iceberg.co.nz/>

Following the visit, our bus driver took us on a tour of Christchurch. Most of what we saw was the results of the two earthquakes that hit Christchurch in 2010 and 2011. The first struck on September 4, 2010, (magnitude 7.0 to 7.1) and the more destructive (magnitude 6.3) that occurred on February 22, 2011. The reason the lower magnitude was more destructive was that it was nearer the city, but more so because it occurred closer to the surface of the earth. It actually took down a TV studio building killing 180 people.

Eight years later and the destruction is still obvious. They are still trying to decide whether to re-build or replace some of the historic buildings and there are empty lots all over the place where they had to remove multi-story buildings. For more information about the earthquakes, check out <https://www.britannica.com/event/Christchurch-earthquakes-of-2010-2011>

This afternoon we were provided tram tickets, good for the day, and left us to tour on our own. We rode the tram the entire route, had ice cream for lunch and walked around a little. Later we went down stairs and had a glass of wine which we enjoyed with our group. From there it was dinner and up to bed for an early start tomorrow...

A little lengthy...sorry...but it was another very good day!

Day 11 (10/24/2019) – Today we were up bright and early for our train ride west into the mountains. The three hours ride went from Christchurch to Arthur’s Pass in the center of the Southern Alps. Many of the mountains are still snowcapped. The scenery was beautiful and we took pictures galore. Once we reached the base of the mountains, the train pretty much followed the river, over bridges and through tunnels. The train has one car specifically for taking pictures, so the photos do not have to be taken through the windows; although some were. You walk to the photo car from the car you are seated in and it is open with a railing on both sides. It does get crowded when the scenery is at its best. At Arthur’s Pass we met our bus and the driver took us the rest of the way through the mountains and on to our next stop in Hokitika along the sea between New Zealand and Australia; the **Tasman Sea**. Of course, Australia is 1,200 miles further west.

In Hokitika we visited a Jade factory, had lunch and, of course, had ice cream. I wasn’t terribly impressed with the Jade factory, but the story about the source of the Jade was interesting.

From Hokitika, we traveled to Franz Josef at the foot of the mountain with the glaciers. Although it was clear where we were, it was very cloudy over the mountains. The travels that that planned helicopter rides, not us, over the glaciers have to wait until tomorrow and hope the helicopters can fly then. I walked around the hotel and town a little, had wine with some of the group and sat with four ladies traveling alone for dinner.

Good Day!

Day 12 (10/25/2019) – Today was an outstanding day and we took a slew of pictures. Our travels were from Franz Josef to Queenstown with a couple really great stops. Our travels today took us across the Southern Alps. The scenery along the way was outstanding. Our first stop was in Fox Glacier where we got great views of the Fox Glacier and Mt. Cook; the highest mountain in New Zealand. Mount Cook is the highest mountain in New Zealand. Its height since 2014 is listed as 3,724 metres (12,218 feet), down from 3,764 m (12,349 ft) before December 1991, due to a rockslide and subsequent erosion. Absolutely beautiful views!

Our next stop was for an excursion boat ride up the Haast River. These were jet boats that drew 4” of water and sailed across the rapids like no trouble. The views along the way were outstanding and the boat captain stopped frequently along the way to explain things. He also did whirlies with the boats at 30 mph. It was fun, informative and absolutely beautiful.

Following the boat ride it was on to Queenstown; outstanding scenery all the way. New Zealand has some unique, but beautiful typography. Although they are both really interesting, I think I like the Southern Island the best.