

10/28/2019

Hi,

Our thirteenth through fifteenth day in New Zealand....

Day 13 (10/26/2019) = We got up this morning, had our usual buffet breakfast and got ready for our optional tour through Skippers Canyon. Had we known what was coming, we may very well have reconsidered. Have you ever ridden on the road into Denali National Park, the Road to Hana in Maui or along the Amalfi Coast in Italy? None of these even come close to what we drove through today in Skippers Canyon.

This photo of the road is no exaggeration! We drove 16.5 miles along the canyon with drop-offs as high as 200+ meters straight down with no guard rails and virtually no room for vehicles to pass; except they did. For those of you not familiar with the metric system, 200 meters is equivalent to 218 yards; greater than the length of two football fields.

Scary part aside....it was an absolutely gorgeous day, no clouds, and truly beautiful trip into the canyon, across the Shotover River twice to Skippers at the end where we had coffee, tea or wine and crumpets. While we were in Skippers enjoying our snacks we learned that there was only one way back; the way we had come. The thrill a second time!

On a couple of occasions, we got out of the four wheel drive vehicle and walked. That was fun, especially since the section we walked on was either flat or downhill.

Once back on solid, paved roads, we all agreed it was a wonderful tour. Would we do it again? Probably not!

If you would like to learn more about Skippers Canyon, click on <https://www.dangerousroads.org/australia-and-oceania/new-zealand/55-skipper-canyon-road-new-zealand.html>

We keep learning over and over again how unique the terrain is in New Zealand. It is absolutely amazing!

Upon our return to Queenstown, we had the van driver drop us off at the base of the gondola overlooking Queenstown. We rode the gondola to the top, looked down at the views, had ice cream and returned to the bottom. There were all kinds of activities up there including; luge, bungee jump, zip line, etc. After Skippers Canyon, we figured we had had our thrills for the day. We had to have the ice cream for lunch since we were told by our program director to have a light lunch because we were taking a boat to some place tonight for a big meal; more about that later!

Once back to the bottom of the gondola, it was decision time. Do we take a taxi back to the hotel or walk? Against Esther's and Joyce's better judgment, I prevailed; we walked. Esther is now napping. Joyce is in her room probably doing the same thing. I'm not sure they appreciated my decision. By the way, we did have to walk quite a bit up hill.

After the ladies naps, we venture out for an included dinner cruise on the TSS Earnslaw steam ship (commissioned in 1912). It was a 45 minute cruise across the lake followed by an outstanding gourmet BBQ with great appetizers, entrees (lamb, beef venison & chicken) and desserts. The meal was followed by a sheep shearing and sheep dog demonstration. On the way back across the lake we participated in a sing-a-long with songs like; My Darling Clementine, Daisy, On Top of Old Smoky, and the like; very modern songs. It was a great, but tiring day.

Day 14 (10/27/2019) – Today was not the day we had hoped for; having been our day to drive to Milford Sound for a dinner overnight cruise. Unfortunately, it was a very rainy day and the road to Milford Sound was closed. So instead of the overnight cruise, we are staying at the Distinction Luxmore Hotel in Te Anau on the shores of Lake Te Anau; second largest lake in New Zealand. The plan was to stay here the night after the Milford Sound cruise, but we are here for two nights instead. If all goes well, the road gets re-opened and we will go to Milford Sound for a lunch cruise tomorrow. We spent a half hour this afternoon at a movie theater watching, at least those not falling asleep, a documentary on the Fiordland National Park. We would have, and may tomorrow, drive through Fiordland on the way to Milford Sound.

Tonight it was wine and dinner at the hotel and early to bed.

Day 15 (10/28/2019) –Well, we made it! The road to Milford Sound opened this morning at 9:00 am and was to remain open until 5:30 pm; being very well controlled. It is the only way for vehicles to get to or from Milford Sound. The road is closed any time there is an avalanche risk due to heavy rain or snow. It was clear, at least not raining, when we left Te Anau this morning. However, by the time we got over the mountains toward Milford Sound, it was raining on and off; more on then off.

At our first stop we walked a scenic path along the river for a few hundred yards and met up with the bus. At our next stop we walked quite a ways to “The Chasm”, being a very deep, narrow gully between steep rocks. In the gully was rushing water with rapids and numerous waterfalls. Around the bus were a few Kea birds. The endangered kea is the world's only alpine parrot, and one of the most intelligent birds; said to have a brain of a five year old. . For more information on the Kea bird, click on <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kea/>

We finally arrived at Milford Sound for our lunch boat ride with our lunch consisting of a sandwich, chips, cheese and crackers, an apple, a cookie and a chocolate bar. Coffee and tea were available near the tables. There were three decks on the boat. A portion of deck two was set up for our group with tables containing our box lunches. We sat and ate our lunch while the ship departed. After we ate, a few of us went up to the third deck which was open, a little cold and in the rain most of the time. Pictures had to be taken in the open areas because the rain on the windows on deck two distorted the pictures. I found that the rear of the boat on deck one was open, but covered. From there I could take my pictures while staying out of the rain and wind; and, pictures I took! Esther and Joyce remained at the table for most of the cruise.

Milford Sound was amazing! One can get two different looks depending on the weather. Sonny days you get one view and rainy days, like today, a different view with waterfalls galore. Milford Sound runs 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) inland from the Tasman Sea and is surrounded by sheer rock faces that rise 1,200 metres (3,900 feet) or more on either side. Milford Sound is the wettest place in New Zealand,

and one of the wettest places in the world, with a mean annual rain fall of 252 inches. The cloud levels varies; some of the time one can see the mountain tops and other times not. At other times the clouds stretch across the mountain and waterfalls are visible above and below the clouds. The boat sailed out the sound to the Tasman Sea and back. In spite of the rain, the views, especially of the water falls, were stunning; well worth the trip, the cold and the rain.

Tonight it is wine and dinner at the hotel.