

Trip Report (New Zealand) - The Dirty Dozen's Adventures Down Under

The Dirty Dozen (our group name) had a great trip to the wonderful lands down under. The trip was filled with memories of places, animals, people and scenery. Leaving Houston late on Friday evening, we had a great flight on Air New Zealand that was fantastic due to the complete service we received (i.e., pillows, blankets, food, wine, beer, movies all without additional fees!!). We slept (at least some of the time) and arrived Sunday morning in Auckland to wonderful fall temperatures and continued on to Queenstown. Each day in New Zealand was full of activities – exploring a historic mining town, hiking around various lakes, hiking on Iron Mountain, a winery tasting, viewing bungy jumping, riding a historic steamship, watching a sheep shearing, seeing sheep farms next to deer farms (no kidding!!), walking in the Botanic Gardens, playing Frisbee golf, fishing in Lake Wakatipu and dining on the trout, sea kayaking in the fiords, walking on the tundra, cruising in Milford Sound, riding a jet boat on 2 rivers, and exploring Queenstown at our leisure.



Our first hike was on the Queenstown Hill where we saw beautiful views of the town. It was not as easy as we thought but we still had an incredible time. We saw red mushrooms, huge red wood trees, ferns and mosses.

We came upon a cairn field and I decided to leave a “rock, stick and pinecone” cairn in the form of a downhill skier (wanted to be sure they knew we had been here). The true hikers on this hill were Vicki Faulkner, Craig Campbell, Stan Kuper, Barbie Miller, Joan Waddill, Mark Monroe and Bob Fried. Betty Ann Adams, Kip Kiplin, and Olga Adair decided early that they were not up for it after traveling through multitudes of time zones. That evening our guides, Claire and Elder, escorted us to dinner at a restaurant at the wharf across from our lakeside hotel.



Over the next few days, we had hikes around Lake Hayes, Lake Wanaka and Lake Te Anau. We were surrounded by beautiful fall foliage, deer farms, fairy mushroom villages (ask Vicki and Dana to explain), art studios and metal sculptures in the trees, purple “bluebonnet” flowers, and giant tree ferns. Craig, Vicki and Stan were more adventurous on one of the hikes so they followed Claire to the overlook on Iron Mountain. We had lunches prepared by our guide, Elder, on the lake picnic grounds and found gelato shops to satisfy our sweet tooth afterwards. Bob was usually the leader in finding the gelato shops.



With Queenstown being on Lake Wakatipu, we found several boating adventures. Wednesday afternoon was free time, so Stan, Betty Ann, and Kip chartered a fishing boat to catch lake trout. Stan had a small one that wasn't a keeper, but Kip landed a 14" brown trout that provided an entre prepared at a local restaurant for a nice romantic dinner for him and Betty Ann. In the harbor of Queenstown is a historic steamship, the TSS Earnslaw, which took the group to a sheep ranch for dinner and an exhibition of shearing a sheep.



Mark, who is a licensed sea captain, approached the captain of the steamer to see if he could take the helm. His trusty sidekick, Stan, went along and both of them were allowed to steer the ship on the way to the ranch. Our last full day in Queenstown we took a Jet Boat ride on the Kawarau and Shotover Rivers. They call it “43 KM of pure adrenalin” and they weren't kidding. It was like a carnival ride on steroids, spinning us around at high speeds on very

shallow water. Barbie saw the ride on the video afterwards because she had her eyes closed the entire trip. What a rush and a great ending to our stay in Queenstown.



While we were on the south island of New Zealand, we visited a place that is like none other in the world....Milford Sound. We were very fortunate to see Mitre Peak on a clear afternoon at sunset. Our guides rushed us there when we cleared the mountain tunnel into the Fiord area because they had only seen clear skies on very rare occasions.



We came to Milford Sound to experience sea kayaking and did we have a day to remember. Olga, Betty Ann and Kip chose to do the harbor cruise instead and they were the only ones that stayed dry. Our provider had long johns, sweats, rain suits, baseball caps and life vests for us to wear which still didn't keep all the water from reaching our skin after 3 hours in the rain. The weather in the fiord is cool and rainy most days which provides spectacular waterfalls on

the sheer cliffs that rise from the ocean. There were hundreds of waterfalls surrounding us as we kayaked around the fiord with sights of fur seals sleeping on shore, several species of birds enjoying the cool rains, and the seals following the kayaks back to our pull out spot. Joan had the only waterproof camera so she was the designated photographer for this adventure.

We managed to find a lot of great pubs in New Zealand, even the oldest one that was in the Cardrona Hotel after one of our hikes. Boy do they have some great local beers...just ask Bob, Mark, Stan, Vicki, Dana, Joan, Barbie, Craig or me for a testimonial!! It's a shame that none of these are available in the US. This Cardrona area also has another landmark that we visited, the "Bra Fence". This fence has hundreds of bras attached to it which allows people to honor breast cancer survivors and those still fighting it.

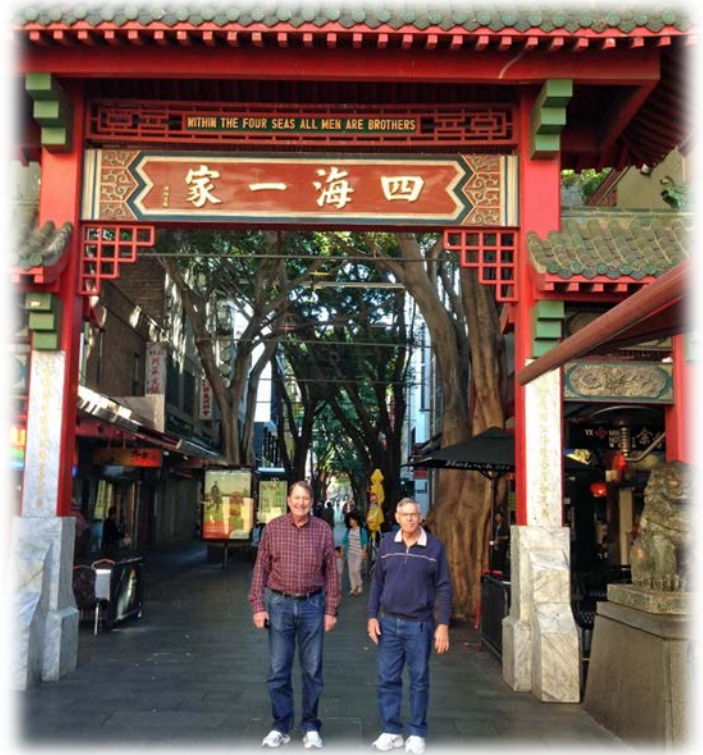


A visit to Queenstown would not be complete without seeing where commercial Bungy Jumping started. We watched several people jump, but nobody in our group was ready to take the plunge. Bob really wanted to pay for Linda to jump but she declined.

After 8 fun filled days, we had to say good-bye to Joan, who was returning to Houston, and our fabulous New Zealand guides, Claire and Elder, and our trusty van "Nancy". (Our provider assigns names to all of their vehicles!!!) Eleven of us continued our journey to Sydney for more adventures. Our hotel was located in the Chinatown and Darling Harbor area of town with lots of fun things nearby.



Our experiences included tours of Sydney; lunch at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia; tour of the Blue Mountain area west of Sydney; visiting a wildlife center to interact with the animals; viewing incredible rock formations, waterfalls and vistas; touring with a woman of Aboriginal descent in the Sydney historic area; touring the Opera House; attending a symphony at the Opera House; visiting the fish market at the harbor; riding the ferry to Manly for beer and the beach; climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge; making a Space City video on the bridge; sharing fresh apple pie from the local fruit stand; experiencing a historic pub tour; and dining at outdoor restaurants in Chinatown and the Darling Harbor area.



Most of the group agrees that a highlight of Sydney was the visit to Blue Mountains and the wildlife center. That day started with the animal center where we saw Dana and Stan feeding Wallabies from ice cream cones; Vicki, Betty Ann and Kip taking photos with Koalas who were busy eating their favorite Eucalyptus leaves; petting wombats; seeing kangaroos and a Tasmanian devil; and many birds like white cockatoos, parrots, and emus. We headed to the Blue Mountains which have this name because of the vapors that are released from the Eucalyptus trees in the area giving an aura of blue color to the mountains from a distance. The Three Sisters Rock Formation and waterfalls were seen by the group on short walks along the ridges of the mountains. We had lunch at the old Hydroelectric Boiler Room in the area and experienced the famous "meat pie" that Aussies eat like we eat hamburgers. On our way back to Sydney, we ventured through some fruit orchards and made a stop where Barbie purchased fresh apples to share and Vicki bought a pie for us to share that evening after dinner.



Our evenings were free time in Sydney, so we divided into many groups and did various activities. Bob, Mark and Stan spent their evening on a historic pub tour while Olga, Barbie, Dana, Vicki and Linda had dinner at an outdoor restaurant on Darling Harbor. Betty Ann and Kip spent an evening with friends that live in the area. We had the pleasure of attending a symphony at the Opera House one evening, adding a memory to treasure.



On our days with free time we also divided into pairings with Olga, Betty Ann and Kip visiting the fish market and taking a harbor cruise; Dana, Vicki, and Mark taking a ferry to Manly (a suburb area of Sydney) to find the famous beach and local cuisine; and Bob, Barbie, Craig, Stan and Linda climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Our final touring adventures were in the Rocks

historic area with an Aboriginal descendant and the tour of the Opera House with lunch. Following these tours, Bob, Mark and Barbie decided to catch the ferry to Manly in search of a bar with only 5 minutes to chug-a-lug beers and catch the returning ferry so as not to miss the symphony that evening. According to Barbie, those were the costliest beers she has ever consumed within a 5-minute period.

Needless to say, we were very busy on this trip. Some of the experiences were exhausting, some were scenic, some were funny, some were relaxing and all were lifetime memories. At our post trip party Chuck Pena stated that "you know a trip was successful when participants drive from San Antonio to be a part of the gathering!" Our trip would not have gone had it not been for our two new friends from Club St. Bernard in San Antonio (Betty Ann and Kip) who joined us on the last possible day of signup. They saved the trip and became a big part of the "Dirty Dozen". The group embraced them and we became a traveling family for 2 weeks. Thanks to all of the wonderful people who had great adventurous spirits that made this trip so fantastic.

Well, as I started this article, I told you that we had many memorable moments together. The Dirty Dozen hiked, walked, drank, climbed, ate, enjoyed music and most of all each other's company. We truly became a family. Thanks to all of them for allowing me to guide them on this adventure of a lifetime. Ga'day mates,

Linda Kuper
(aka Mom Kuper),
Trip Coordinator