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Sweet Road Trip

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Sweet Road Trip



Mount Cook National Park

Wow, what an awesome trip! Over 13 days Cody, Taylor (another American we met here), and I traveled over 3,900 kilometers (roughly 2,400 miles). In just two short weeks, we saw the majority of the country, and man is it something else!

We flew into Christchurch, the South Island's largest city, which was devastated by an earthquake in 2011 that destroyed much of downtown. Four years later, the city is still in the midst of a major rebuild. It was a shame to see many old buildings covered top to bottom in scaffolding. From Christchurch, we drove down the east coast to Oamaru, which boasts a few of New Zealand's only penguin colonies. We opted to attempt to catch a glimpse of the more rare yellow-eyed penguins, which come ashore during the evening. To our luck, we managed to see three from a distance of about 300 yards. Even though they were just specks on the beach, we can now say we've personally seen penguins.

Our next stop, Dunedin, was the farthest south we traveled. Unfortunately it was pouring rain during our day there, but we still got out and hiked down to a really nice beach with spectacular rock formations and white sand. Next, we traveled west to the "adventure capital of the world," Queenstown, and it sure does live up to its name. Activities range from hiking to bungee jumping to skydiving. Oh, and it's located on a lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains that are just breathtaking. From one stunning place to another,

we traveled to Fiordlands National Park and Milford Sound. Taking a cruise in the sound is a must-do in order to get a sense of the enormity of the fiords.

The afternoon was absolutely spectacular without a cloud in the sky, and to cap it off, a pod of dolphins accompanied our boat back into the harbor with one swimming right alongside us. We then started back north stopping in Wanaka where we did a grueling hike. After making it most of the way to the top, we decided to call it quits as the path became too icy to walk on. Our last stop on the south island was Mount Cook National Park. This may have been my favorite place on the trip. The village we stayed in is at the end of a glacial valley right in the middle of the Southern Alps. There is just one road that goes in to the village. Fortunately, the road was clear of snow, but the mountains weren't, leading to some spectacular views. We did a hike through the valley to a glacial lake where pieces of the glacier had broken off and were floating on the surface. We were told that the ice that had broken off was millions of years old! That's pretty tough to wrap your brain around.

To get back to the North Island, we took a bumpy ferry trip across Cook Straight to the capitol of New Zealand, Wellington. There, we took a tour of the parliament buildings and checked out the Museum of New Zealand. Two long drives later, we made it back to Auckland where we originally flew out. Overall, the trip was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore this gorgeous country. Sometimes we get too caught up in life to realize how beautiful this world really is. I'm finding that out in New Zealand, where within a day you can find yourself looking at something you can't find anywhere else in the world.

Matt