

FHPW's New Zealand Adventures of the Twenty Terribly Terrific Texans Feb. 6-21, 2016

by Kay King, FHPW Travel Director

Feb 6 Arrive Auckland. After a comfortable non-stop flight from Houston we were met at the airport in the early morning and transferred to the Rydges Hotel, which is centrally located in the beautiful harborside city of Auckland, "The City of Sails." We had several hours to explore Auckland on the "hop on, hop off" tour bus,



go to the top of the **Sky Tower** that was beautifully decorated for Chinese New Year, visit the unique aquarium or take a harbor tour before an evening reception. Included in our trip would be a full breakfast daily and most dinners.

Feb 7 Auckland – Bay of Islands. We boarded our luxurious tour bus and had an unexpected stop at a wonderful **sheep shearing show** where **Sandra Mourton bottle-fed a sheep**. We then headed north to the Waipoua Kauri Forest Reserve, one



of New Zealand's most famous Kauri forests and the largest of its kind remaining on the North Island. A short walk took us to the base of a **giant Kauri tree**, called Ta-ne



Mahuta or "Lord of the Forest," the largest and most celebrated Kauri tree known. At the Kauri Museum we saw the famous **Gum Collection** that looked like amber. Our hotel overlooked the Waitangi Treaty grounds in the Bay of Islands where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840. That evening we were treated to a Special Welcome Dinner. Copthorne Hotel & Resort, 2 nights.

Feb 8 Bay of Islands at Leisure – The Bay of Islands is home to 144 islands providing an aquatic playground off the north coast of the North Island. We had a full day at leisure to explore the idyllic subtropical surrounds. Perhaps relax on a pristine beach, explore the wilderness areas via one of the many walking tracks, or set off into town and dine at a local restaurant. **But it was Super Bowl "Monday!"**



New Zealand is one day ahead of the US, so the game was aired live on ESPN. We found a great little bar (above a veterinary clinic) that had the game showing on two large screen TVs. Since this was the





first FHPW trip that included men, it was critical that we find a broadcast of the Super Bowl game even though the New Zealand broadcast did not air any of those great commercials. But we did see and hear **Lady GaGa** sing the national anthem. George Hanst (Sandra's husband), Rod Callaway (Lellany's husband), David Smith (Connie's husband) and George King (Kay's husband) put together a football pool that was won quarterly by Lynn Smith, **Lellany, Rod** and Connie. There was a wonderful craft fair in the street below the bar. The bar had great hamburgers and fries and several of us discovered **Ginger Beer**. We really made the barkeeper's day! Some of our group took a



delightful evening dinner cruise to Haruru Falls.

Feb 9 Bay of Islands – Auckland. We explored New Zealand's finest national maritime park on a dolphin-



watching cruise to the Cape Brett Peninsula. This coastline provides sheltered waters for dolphins, whales, seals, penguins and other marine life. We journeyed past the famous **Hole in the Rock**, a distinctive arch formation that defines this remarkable coast. Later, we returned to Auckland and the Rydges Hotel.

Feb 10 Auckland – Waitomo Caves – Rotorua. We traveled south to Waitomo, home to the famous **glowworm caves**, where thousands of tiny luminescent creatures radiated an unmistakable glow. We saw the magnificent cathedral caves and amazing stalactites on a silent boat ride through the mystical glowworm caves lit by thousands



of tiny glowworms. We toured the labyrinth of underground limestone caverns that were formed more than 30 million years ago before continuing to the geothermal capital of New



Zealand, Rotorua. We visited Te Puia - New Zealand's premier cultural centre - and enjoyed a guided tour of the **Maori Arts and**



Crafts Institute where we saw our first **Kiwi, maori sculpture** and **native clothing** made from the **flax plant**. Then to the



Whakarewarewa Thermal Valley to witness the phenomenal natural spectacle of **erupting geysers** and bubbling mud pools. At Te Puia we were treated to a **Maori Hangi Feast** cooked over hot rocks with performances of **song and dance**. We toasted this





wonderful evening with hot chocolate by the geysers and all touched the green jade stone for luck as we left. Rydges Rotorua, 2 nights
Feb 11 Rotorua. Rotorua captured the essence of New

Zealand with its geothermal geysers, fascinating Maori culture and rich heritage. The city is positioned on The Pacific Rim of Fire, and is therefore one of the world's most active geothermal areas. We began with a buffet breakfast aboard the Lakeland Queen, cruising over the still blue waters of Lake Rotorua. We



visited one of New Zealand's

best-loved attractions, the Agrodome, displaying 19 varieties of sheep and dramatic dog trials. Some walked through the Rotorua Gates to the Rotorua Museum with its many Maori artifacts. Others took the guided tour to The Hobbiton, the 1250 acre rolling hills farm where the middle-earth Hobbit movies were filmed. We saw the Hobbit houses, gardens and the Green Dragon Inn. Others took the Duck Boat Cruise or enjoyed a helicopter flight for views over the active White Island volcano.



Feb 12 Rotorua - Taupo – Wellington. Departing Rotorua, we travelled along the Thermal Explorer Highway through a region abundant with geothermal activity, crystal-clear lakes, natural spas, seals on rocks and what they call the cabbage tree and we call dracaena marginata. We saw endless abundant



grape orchards for wine production and farms raising sheep, cattle and deer. Roasted venison is a popular New Zealand dish. A few of us had Curly Prawns for lunch. We

visited Lake Taupo, the largest freshwater lake in Australasia and thundering Huka Falls with its blue water, before travelling across the vast volcanic plateau of World Heritage-listed Tongariro National Park en-route to Wellington, the nation's capital. A cable car ride to the top of the hill provided a stunning view of the capital. Hotel Ibis, Wellington



Feb 13 Wellington - Cook Strait – Ashburton. The

Cook Strait separates the North and South Islands and was named after Captain James Cook, the first European to sail across in 1770. We enjoyed one of the world's most scenic voyages as the Interislander ferry traversed Cook Strait through the breathtaking Marlborough and Queen Charlotte Sounds. Here, we



weaved through unspoiled islands and admired coastlines defined by tiny coves on the way to the seaside port of Picton. Once in Picton, we took a spectacular scenic drive to Kaikoura, famed for whale watching and nestled at the foot of majestic mountains. Now on the South Island, we noticed the change in terrain from the lush tropical greenery of the North Island to the snow capped mountains of the South Island. Later, we arrived in Ashburton and settled in to our hotel before dinner. Hotel Ashburton



Happy Valentine's Day, Feb 14 - Ashburton – Fox Glacier. After David presented Connie with a Valentine's Day rose we all posed for a photo at the