

New Zealand: Day 1 2/18

Long story short: we didn't go much of anywhere.

THE LOWLIGHTS:

- I added an extra digit to our passport numbers on our NZETAs. AKA, the thing we need to enter NZ.

— Suzhily, Khadijah at the American Airlines check-in desk was able to get us sorted, but it took a while & I felt so bad I almost cried.

- American then cancelled our flight to Dallas, and we found out our only recourse was to try again exactly 24 hrs later.

— taking off at 5:51 PM EST, landing ~8 PM CST, and finally departing for NZ at 11 PM CST.

— they put us on standby for a 7 am flight to DFW.

2/19/25

* THIS
MEANS:

We have lost a day of our vacation. We have cried about it plenty. Feels like a board game - first flight got cancelled! See a twin.

AND THE
ICING ON THE
CAKE:

They did have one other option to get us there sooner, BUT:

* THE SUGGESTED ALT
FLIGHT PLAN:

JAX → Dallas (CD)

Dallas → La Guardia (NY)

La Guardia → JFK (NY)

JFK → Auckland

And all this overnight.

We booked a hotel in JAX for the night, rearranged our bookings, & managed to go on the 7 am flight.

Oh joy!



New Zealand: Day 2 2/19

Caught 7 am flight to DFW.
AKL flight still at 1 pm.

Got day passes for lounge access.
WORTH IT

New Zealand Day 2 cont'd. 2/22/25

✈️ 15 hr plane flight? Shockingly, not so bad.

Alex fell asleep before we took off + slept for 7 solid hours.

He was slumped over + super into.

Both Jack + I managed some scattered sleep. Overall, not so bad.

We "lost" a day travelling, so when we landed it was

New Zealand Day 3 (2/21)

Customs was a lot easier than

Biosecurity.

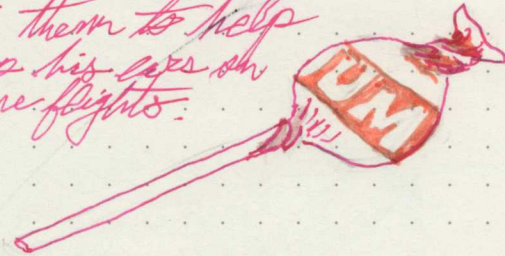
We went through three separate rounds of it - speaking to a person, speaking to another person, we declared our items (read: Alex's food) and then finally, an X-ray machine.

2/22/25
One of our bags got pulled to the side after the X-ray. The agent said,

"I see a bunch of little small, round things. What are those?"

ANSWER: lollipops.

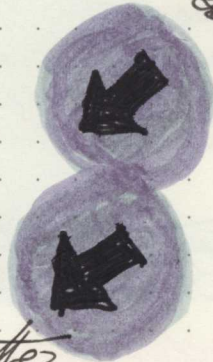
We got them to help hide pop his ears on the plane flights.



We successfully got into the country, picked up our rental car, + started driving.



Some examples of road signs



It's hard to switch over your brain to driving on the left side of the road, but speeds are lower overall.

New Zealand Day 3 cont'd 2/2/25

It wasn't too hard to get to our hotel in

ROTORUA

the land of geothermal hot springs
and tourist traps.

Although, on the way we passed through
some "road works" (construction). At
the car in front of us pinged some gravel
into our "windscreen" (windshield).

✱ ← full size recreation
of the brock.

Now I'm really glad I was paranoid
and paid for the highest level of rental
insurance. It was aptly named "Peace of Mind."

Because of the local hot springs the hotel
has a geothermally heated pool as well as
two soaking pools of hot springs water
for us to enjoy.

Apparently the heat (+ the minerals) comes from the
water coming into contact with lava underground.

Smells strongly of sulfur! But feels
great on the skin.

2/2/25

OPEN FOR ROTORUA MAP ↘



Our hotel room came with a free bottle of milk
from a local dairy called 'Volcanic Creamery'.

New Zealand Day 4 2/22 2/22/25

Alex managed to sleep his normal 12 hrs last night, + we passed out around 9:15. So we felt great this morning. We walked over + got breakfast at a food real/lure/brew called Eat Street. *their spelling*

We then took ourselves to
Agrodome!

They call themselves a farm experience, which is pretty much what it is. There was a stage show with a bunch of sheep, a cow, + a few ducks, lambs, + herding dogs.

They teach herding dogs here a thing called "lasking" where they literally run along the backs of the sheep!



One of the dogs tripped and had to awkwardly scramble back up off the sheep. None of the 19 separate breeds of sheep gave a shit about any of this.



We also got to go on a tour of the farm in a vehicle. We stopped in a few places + got to hand feed sheep, alpacas, + red deer.

We got to pet everything + Alex loved it.

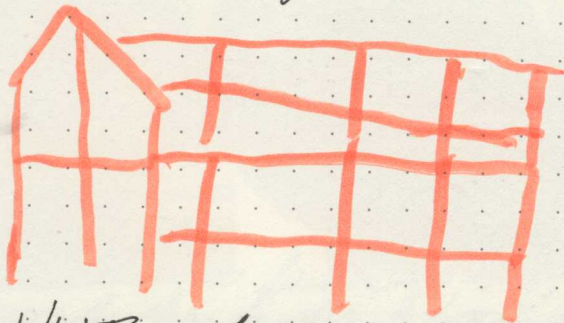
New Zealand Day 4 CONT'D. 2/24/25

After that we went ~~home~~ to the hotel for Alex's nap. We had ~~so~~ many options of things to do, but since he woke up, we chose to walk around the Government Gardens.



It was a beautiful public park leading up to a beautiful old building.

like this - except it was covered in scaffolding so not really like this at all. It was being renovated.



Apparently WWI veterans came to Rotorua to convalesce and heal, thanks to the geothermal springs + their healing mineral pools. These geothermal

2/24/25

pools have been used for centuries to heal people, + even to cook!

We saw one in the gardens called

Rachel Spring
but really also,

Whangapiro.

It sits at a cozy 212 Fahrenheit.



plus the kind of get away from me...

Alex tried to blow on it to cool it off.



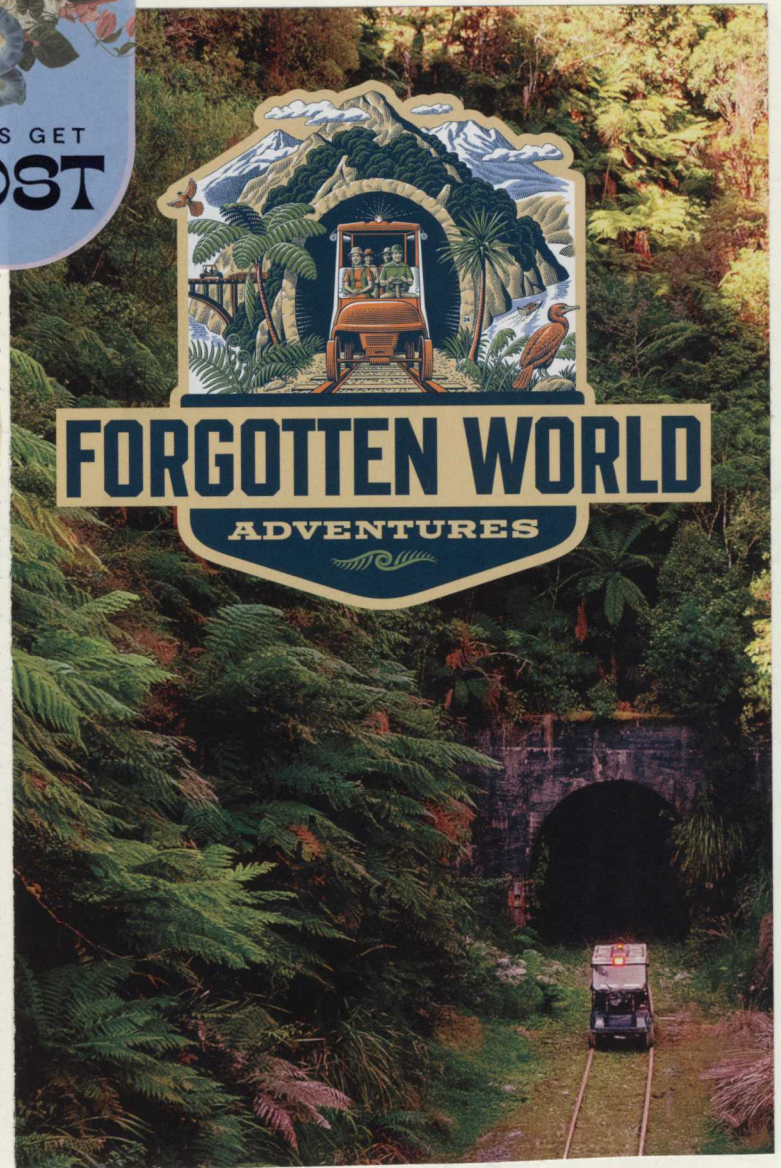
New Zealand - Day 5 2/23 2/24/25

We got up + drove 2 hours to get to
our reservation at

FORGOTTEN WORLD.

(Adventures)

It was a 6-hour ride on
modified golf carts on the disused
train tracks of the old railway that
used to connect the old mining + logging
industries to Stratford (+ the rest of
New Zealand). It was really amazing
to learn all the history. Plus they fed us
lunch, as well as tea alongside the tracks.
I accidentally had a beet-jam sandwich, but it wasn't
half bad!

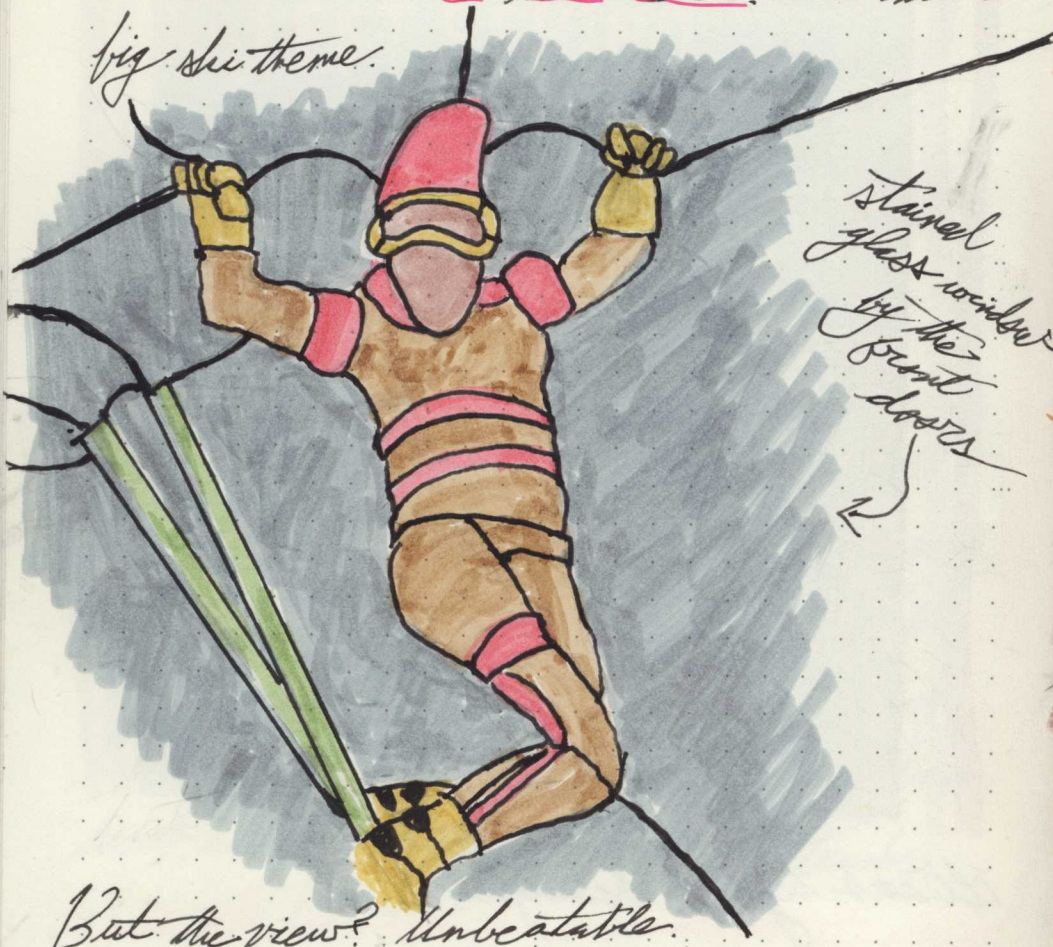


It was beyond beautiful.

New Zealand Day 5 - CONT'D 3/3/25

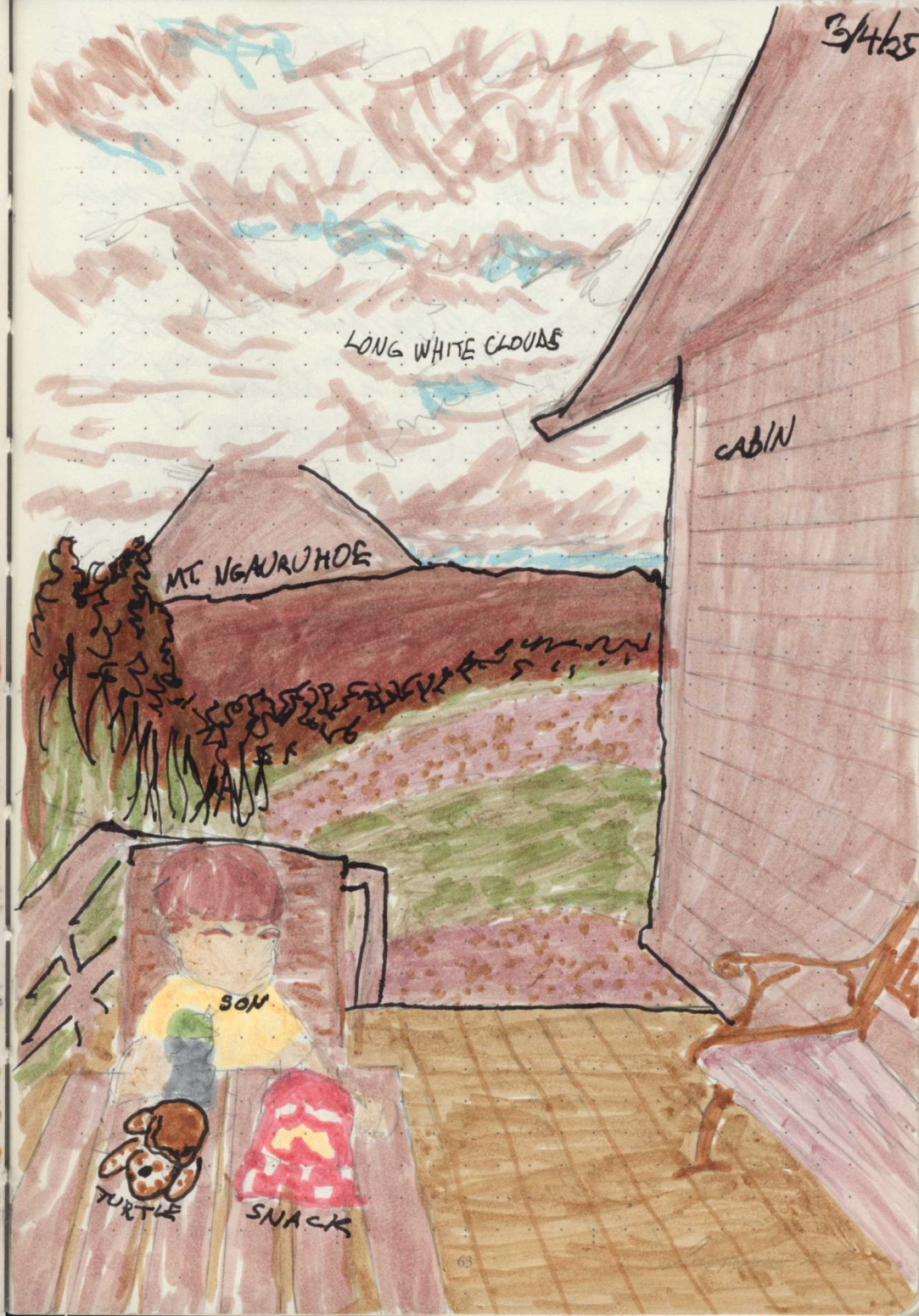
After that we drove on to our next hotel - the "Hotel" Alpine Hotel. It's a ski resort in winter months, and located inside of Tongariro National Park.

The hotel was... a little dated... and had a big ski theme.



But the view? Unbeatable.

3/4/25



New Zealand - Day 6 2/24 3/3/25

We had a low-key morning while we put our clothes through the laundry. The main lobby had a loft, with a ton of toys for kids to play with. Alex had a great time while we waited for a broken dryer to dry our clothes. (We hung them around some radiators to dry, since we found out.)



3/4/25
Then we went on a gondola up Mt. Ruapehu. In winter it's a skiing hotspot, but in the summer it was just a very windy place with nice views. They had a burger restaurant in the building at the top which was... fine?



After Alex's nap, we walked down to the park's visitor center + checked out the displays. New Zealand history is ~~so~~ interesting - the formation of the mountains, the creation of the park, + even their attempts to eliminate invasive species all have a rich depth + history to them.

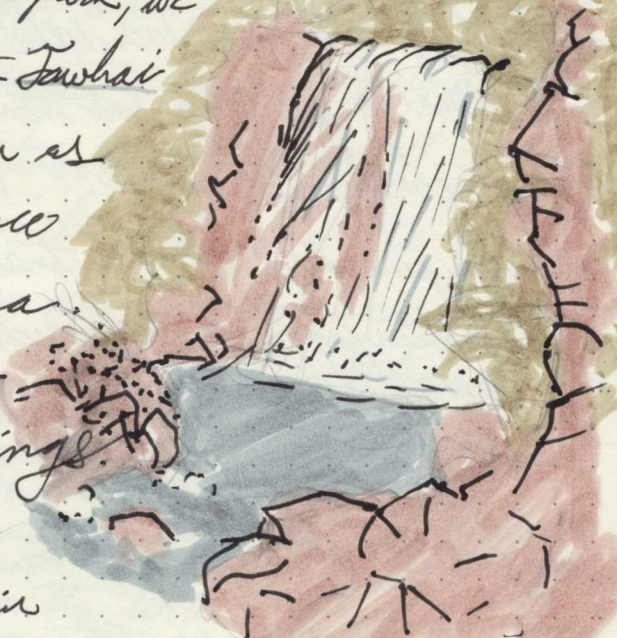
Dinner at the hotel both nights was much better than the Sky Waka burgers.

We also walked around an "abandoned" resort called the Chateau Tirohanga. It only closed in 2023 but it already has creepy vibes.

New Zealand - Day 7 2/25

3/5/25

Before we left the park, we walked down to Tawhai Falls, also known as "Golumistool" since it was used as a filming spot in the Lord of the Rings.



We were only tiny specks in nature, and of course Alex seemed even smaller in the face of the big wide world.

We had a four and a half hour total drive between us and our next hotel, the Claremont Motel in Martinborough. On my planning, I had written down a few places along our route where we could stop + do things.

Our Stops That Day:

3/5/25

Wool Co.

A roadside store with NZ wools goods I got a skein of a nice teal 100% merino yarn as well as merino "bed socks" that have been so nice for keeping my chilly feet warm.

Feilding

A town supposedly voted "most beautiful" 16 times. It seemed nice! We stopped for lunch. Alex and I both had fish n' chips - we both (correctly) love it.

Pukaha

Pukaha National Wildlife Centre was amazing! Devoted to native species, they primarily work with birds, but they did have a family of tuataras (too-uh tar-uh). The parent tuataras were 80+ years old + just had a surprise baby two years ago! Plus they had BABY KIWI BIRDS!

New Zealand - Day 8 2/26 3/6/25

Martinsborough's placement in the Wairarapa Dark Sky Reserve meant a beautiful night at yet another cute little motel with free local milk in the mini fridge.

The town square was equally lovely, and we took in the sights there in the morning before we headed out. I dropped into the local coffee shop and was able to pick up a new toy for Alex - dominoes with "Kiwi" vehicles on them.



Alex calls them "domidses"

3/6/25

We then trundled our way to Heitike Regional Park, a beautiful park near Wellington. The park has a whole short walk through the area that was used for filming Rivendell. It was gorgeous, and Alex enjoyed "leading" us on the path.

The park also had a lovely river access area and a huge, gorgeous swinging bridge. Alex needed to have his hand ^{held} on the bridge, since it was a little scary. He still loved it, though.

We arrived in Wellington in time for lunch + a stop at a lovely local fabric store.

At the fabric store I got:



2 meters GREEN Linen
1.5 meters Red/white striped Rayon-Linen blend
1 Ivy Dress pattern

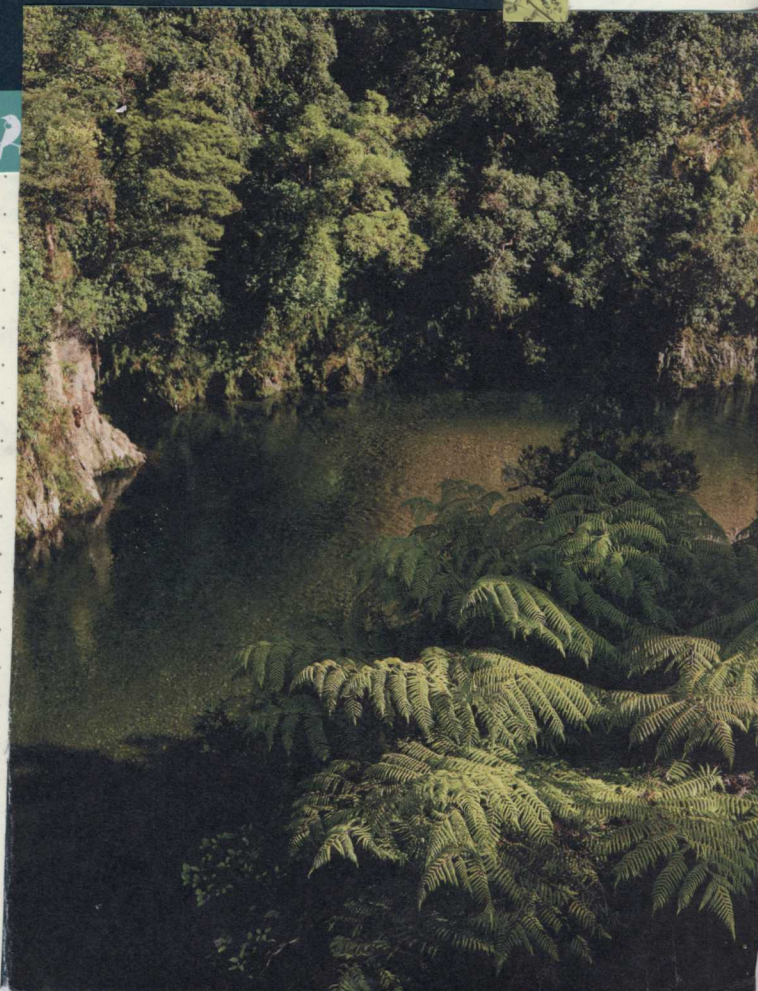
(It was literally called The Fabric Store)

New Zealand - Day 8 | CONT'D.

3/6/25



KAITOKE REGIONAL PARK



Pristine forests, swimming and camping

Only 45 minutes north of Wellington city, the spectacular Kaitoke Regional Park covers 2,860 hectares in the foothills of the Tararua Ranges. Steep bush-clad hills, the Hutt River gorge, and centuries-old rātā, rimu and beech forest feature in this magnificent area.

Swim in tranquil river pools or explore beautiful bush-clad tracks (some suitable for wheelchairs). Walk the Ridge Track for wonderful views of the Upper Hutt valley. Visit the magical spot used as a set for Rivendell in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Stay the night at the campground and enjoy the BBQ facilities.

Towering rainforest

Near the fork of the Pākuratahi and Hutt rivers lies a podocarp broadleaf vegetation of the Akaroa rātā, hīnau and kāmahi with red beech appearing in the beech forest is mostly tops and areas with hard beech on the terrace. The Pākuratahi River, near The rivers and varieties many native birds. Y (pigeon), pīwakawaka (New Zealand bush



ENGLISH

TE PAPA
OUR PLACE



MUSEUM OF
NEW ZEALAND
TE PAPA
TONGAREWA

TĒPU PĀRONGO |
INFORMATION DESK

KARIPORI: TE PAKANGA NUI |
GALLIPOLI: THE SCALE OF OUR WAR

Experience the creative artistry of Wētā Workshop,
and explore the eight-month Gallipoli campaign.

FUN FACT

The figures in Gallipoli are huge -
2.4 times human size! They're made
of all sorts of materials - fibreglass,
silicone, even yak tail.

3/12/25
Te Papa Tongarewa was incredible. Alex
was soored/lored by the Gallipoli exhibit, so Josh
re-did that one while I pushed Alex through
a Vivienne Westwood special exhibit. Alex
fell asleep while watching an abstract art video
with dancing ice beans, so we called an
early quits.

Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War LEVEL 2



Te Taiao | Nature



COLOSSAL
SQUID



EARTHQUAKE HOUSE

TE TAIAO | NATURE

You're the explorer in Te Taiao
| Nature. Celebrate Aotearoa
New Zealand's unique natural
environment - and get ready
for our future as kaitiaki
(guardians).

New Zealand - Day 9 ^{2/57} 3/14/25

This was the day of our Weta Workshop tour! It was a fun look into a company that built our childhoods. It was nice to see how much they enable wide-ranging creativity. Several of the employees sold non-Weta crafts in the gift shops, + they were given platforms on the tour to highlight their processes. ***

Smuggled guess
↓



kindness is golden

3/14/25
Afterwards we went on the Wellington Cable Car - which is actually a funicular. We got lunch at the top and then walked down, which was exhausting, but we got some incredible views of the city as we walked through botanical gardens and a historic cemetery!



New Zealand - Day 10 2/28 3/8/25

This day was a bit hectic, and went through several itinerary changes.

Version One (before booking anything)

- Take scenic train from Wellington to Auckland. (8 hrs)
- Stay in Auckland overnight so we can fly home the next day.

But as I was booking everything I read that the train can become very delayed on the journey - go to being 12 hours for the Wellington-Auckland journey. Driving would take a similar amount of time. So I changed the plan.

Version Two (the "toddler adjustment")

- Take a flight from Wellington to Auckland at 11 AM. (1 hr)
- Stay in Auckland overnight.

3/8/25

In both versions, we didn't have anything concrete planned in Auckland, so we could rest for most of the day & be better prepared for our flight.

HOWEVER: That was before our original flights to New Zealand got cancelled, and we were delayed by 24 hours. ^{My} That delay specifically meant we were going to miss our planned visit to the Hobbiton movie set, which was a #1 priority for both Josh and I.

I called from our Jacksonville hotel room to reschedule. The only time left still available, during the entirety of our vacation?

3:20 PM, February 28th.

Our last day

New Zealand - Day 10 (CONT'D) 3/22/25

~~So that's~~ how we ended up with

Version Three ("the only option")

- Take a flight from Wellington 1hr to Auckland at 11 AM.
- Rent a new rental car.
- Drive to the Hobbiton tour 2 hrs in Matamata.
- Stay overnight in Matamata.
- Drive back to Auckland for 1 hr flight home 2 hrs.

So that's what we did. The flight was super easy - the driving sucked. We were very -

35825
~~close~~ on time, but we made it, and it was beautiful.

The rolling hills and paths were so familiar-like an old friend. Some of it was built to smaller perspective - it was funny seeing Alex stand by a hobbit hole his size. We learned they have on-site artisans who are continually building + improving upon the site - they debuted two fully-finished interiors in 2023! We got to tour one, and I was wild with delight looking at everything. Off only will

had a million hours.

AIR NEW ZEALAND

MASSRE MSTR ALEX

CHLD

SEAT AND BAG

FROM: WELLINGTON
TO: AUCKLAND
DATE: 28FEB

ESTIMATED BOARDING: 10:25 AM

GATE:

13

SEAT:

16F

COMMENTS:

AIRPOINTS:

BAG TAG NO: NZ484695-7 AKL

BAG TAG NO:

PASSPORT NO:

ETKT

071

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

FLIGHT:

NZ 420

FLIGHT:

NZ 420

FROM: WLG

TO: AKL

DATE:

28FEB

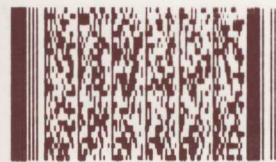
ESTIMATED BOARDING:

10:25 AM

SEAT:

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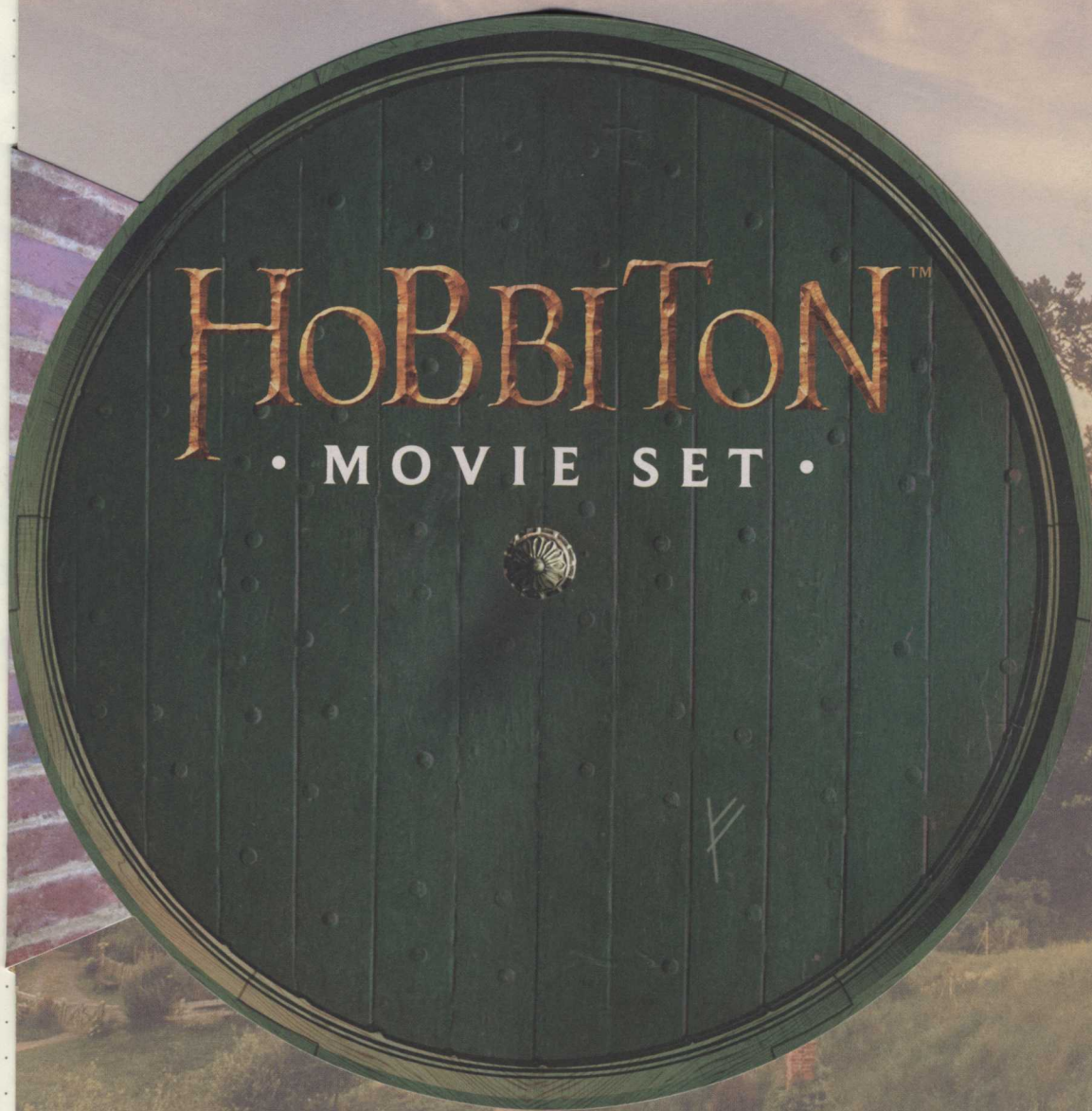
KA25



Fold open for
the map →

"In a hole in
the ground
there lived
a hobbit."

2 ceramic tile
that was set into a
doorway →



3/28/25



Home is behind
the world ahead
And there are many
paths to tread
Mist and shadow to the
edge of night
Until the stars are all
alight
Mist and shadow, cloud
and shade
All shall fade, all
shall fade...



free cider
(locally
brewed)
from the green
daz gon inn

Thoughts on the Trip

3/28/25

Alex still talks about getting to see the kiwi birds. It was rough for him to go back to school - he loved the excitement of each new day.

It was a beautiful trip - I wish we had more time to enjoy every inch of the incredible beauty that we were so lucky to witness. I'm not sure I've fully processed everything that we were lucky enough to see. It was so much. It was everything.

Assorted Trip Memories

3/30/25

Alex found \$3 in dollar coins to be the perfect "treasure". We ended up with \$7.70 in treasure.

What a haul!



* birds all around



Feeling like anything was possible each day



* Being able to create so much joy and memories with my family



lots of very pretty women with high cheekbones



The light, chilly wind that was everywhere and kept the hottest days comfortable

