

NEW ZEALAND 2024 /2025 - PART VIII

OPONONI - SNELLS BEACH - THAMES - WHITIANGA

From the Bay of Islands on the east coast of the north island we headed to the west coast of the north island to stay a few days in Opononi and explore that area.

Opononi is where Opo the bottlenose dolphin became famous for playing with the children during the summers of 1955 to 1956. Opo inspired songs, several documentaries, novels, children's story books, and even a theatre-play / eBook.



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On our way to Opononi we stopped for lunch at a waterfront cafe in Rāwene, a small town with a population of about 480 at last count, about a hundred more people than live in Opononi. During the Covid years roads to the town were blocked off, but outside of that we were told that life was pretty normal due to Rāwene's isolated location.

A small car ferry links Rāwene to Kohukohu just across the Hokianga Harbor on the north side.



20. Vacuum Cupping 真空拔罐	20
21. Cupping+Oil Massage 拔罐+油壓	60
22. Scraping(Guasha) neck+Shoulders	40
23. Scraping(Guasha) neck+Shoulders	60
24. Blood Letting 放血	
25. Moxibustion 艾炙	20
26. Tuina 推拿	30
27. Acupoint Shiatsu 穴位指壓	60
28. Tendon therapy 拔筋	60

Vouchers available

Rāwene's Grapevine Massage had some unusual items on their menu. The Chinese Medicine items were interesting and the *Blood Letting* really got my attention. We needed to get on to Opononi to check in at our next lodging... otherwise I'd have stayed longer and given it more consideration.

A local gas station we stopped at had a time capsule garage.



Grapevine Massage

M: 027 477 6558

Time Dry Oil
(mins) (\$) (\$)

Body Massage 身体按摩

1. Head 頭	10	15	20
2. Neck & Head 頸+頭	15	20	25
3. Head & Neck & Shoulders	20	30	35
4. Neck & Shoulders & Back 頸+肩+背	30	45	50
5. Back & Legs 背+腿	40	60	70
6. Whole Body 全身	60	85	95
7. Whole Body 全身	90	130	140
8. Whole Body 全身	120	160	170
9. Hot Stone Massage 熱石按摩	40	80	
10. Hot Stone Massage 熱石按摩	60	110	
11. Hot Stone Massage 熱石按摩	90	150	

Reflexology 腳底按摩

12. Reflexology 腳底按摩	30	50	
13. Reflexology+Foot Spa	30+10	60	
14. Reflexology 腳底按摩	40	80	
15. Reflexology 腳底按摩	60	90	
16. Reflexology+Whole body	90	140	
17. Reflexology+Whole body	120	180	

Chinese Medicine 中醫療法

18. ACC acupuncture 針灸	60	20	
19. Acupuncture+Massage 針灸+按摩	40	65	
20. Vacuum Cupping 真空拔罐	20	30	
21. Cupping+Oil Massage 拔罐+油壓	60	90	
22. Scraping(Guasha) neck+Shoulders	40	60	
23. Scraping(Guasha) neck+Shoulders	60	90	
24. Blood Letting 放血	30		
25. Moxibustion 艾炙	20	50	
26. Tuina 推拿	30	60	
27. Acupoint Shiatsu 穴位指壓	60	100	
28. Tendon therapy 拔筋	60	100	130

Vouchers available

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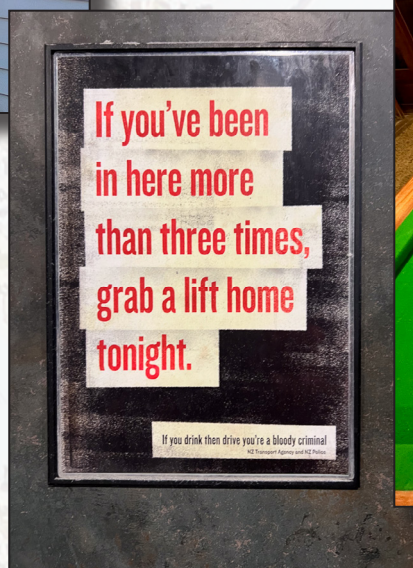
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Our cabin in Opononi had a nice view and easy walk to the restaurant / bar down the hill.



I thought the public service announcement above the urinals in the bar were appropriate.



On a guided walk in the Waipoua Forest we saw Te Matua Ngahere, a giant kauri tree. The tree's Māori name means "*Father of the Forest*". With a girth of over 16m (52 ft) and almost 30m (100 ft), it is believed to be the second largest living kauri tree and to have the biggest girth of any tree in New Zealand.

It has been variously estimated to be between 1,200 and 2,000 years old; or between 2,000 and 3,000 years old; or even 4,000 years old. One resource claims that Te Matua Ngahere may be the oldest tree in New Zealand, while another suggests that it is the oldest rainforest tree on Earth.

Greatly revered by the Māori, it is watched over by many local Māori Guardians. The tree, a remnant of the ancient rainforest that once grew on the North Auckland Peninsula, has a relationship with other flora, such as orchids, clubmoss, and a rata tree that grow on it.

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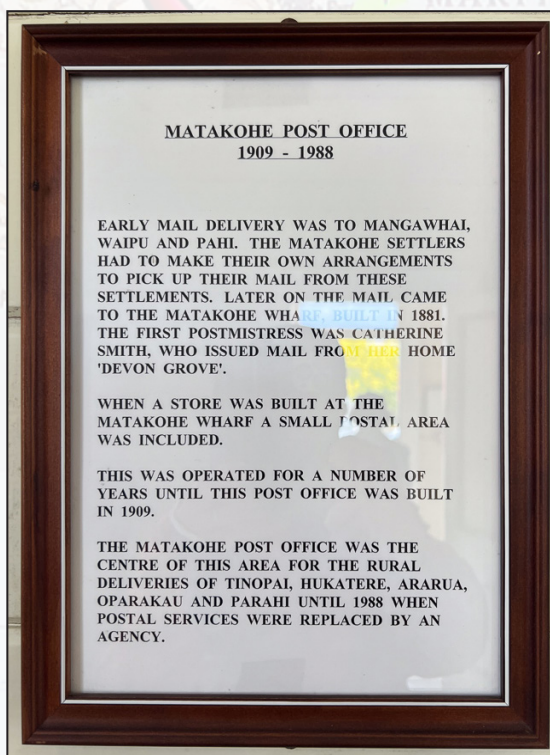
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On our way to our over the Xmas holidays base camp at Snells Beach, we stopped in the village of Matakoho for lunch and to visit the Kauri Museum. The museum contains many exhibits that depict the pioneering days when early European settlers in the area logged kauri timber and extracted kauri gum.

We noticed a small gallery next to the museum and historic post office. A visit to the gallery added to our 7 months of luggage we were packing with us with a new quilt and placements of bird theme. The quilt with indigenous birds of New Zealand painted on it now hangs on our new Poulsbo home. The quilted place mats of Wendy's favorite New Zealand bird, the Tui, have already been used accordingly at our new home as well.



After finding a place for the new quilt and placemats in our seven months of luggage that was stuffed into the back of the rental car we toured the old post office.



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After checking out the post office time capsule we headed next door to the Kauri Museum and enjoyed the displays there.

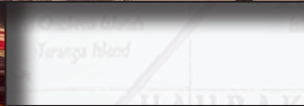


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Photographer's Darkroom



Using these same tools and technique, in the 1970s I chopped up decades old cedar stumpage (huge cedar trees that had been cut down and left in the forests during the clear cut logging days).

Once felled, the cedar trees were left there because there was no market for cedar back then. Decades later, when cedar became valuable, we went back it to harvest the already felled trees. We were called "Shake Rats". It was hard work in rough hillside terrain with no roads to access the trees. When I'd have enough cedar blocks called shake bolts (every few days) helicopters would come, pick up the slings of shake bolts, fly them to nearby roads where trucks waited for them, and the trucks took them to mills for shakes and shingles.



Making Shakes

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In New Zealand grocery stores there is typically at least one entire isle dedicated solely to the vast range of flavored chips.



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Our next base camp was at Snells Beach where we spent the Christmas holidays. It was in Snells Beach we spotted our first Kiwi bird.



At Snells Beach there was a New Zealand Dotterel nesting area. With a long lens it was possible to get some nice images and stay far enough away not to cause concern to any Dotterels. Bird images will be in a later *Flying Pig Adventures* travelogue



We saw lots of *freedom camping* in New Zealand. Decades ago we planned to tour New Zealand, renting a camper and staying in these sorts of places. This one just a few spaces in a typical public parking lot, but right next to the beach.





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Snells Beach was a popular spot for water sports. The Loc Ness like feature to the right is a hydrofoil wind surfer in the only position I was able to see them in. Evidently they are supposed to do the thing in the two sample fotos below that I found of that sport online.



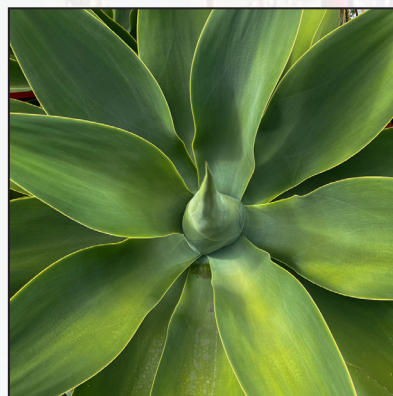
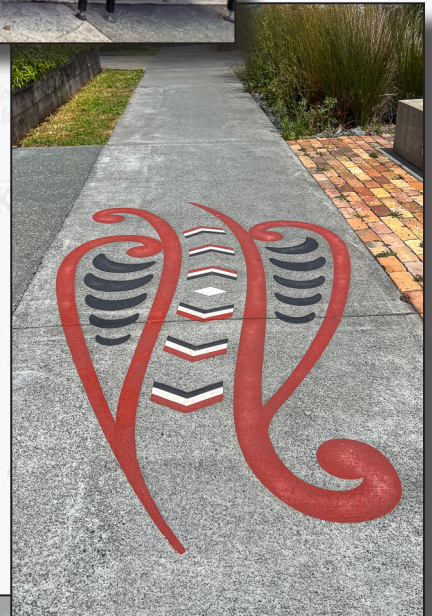
There were more interesting public toilets in nearby Matakana, a small village we visited a few times for the easy walks, bakeries, cafes, and interesting things to see.



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The Matakana post office and the Matakana waterfall / stairway below.



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~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~

A highlight of our time at Snells Beach was the sculpture trail at the Brick Bay Winery. The trail is about 2km (1.2 mile) long through native bush and open pastures with contemporary artworks displayed and installed all along the trail and boardwalks. Much of the sculpture is a result of the Brick Bay Folly Competition.



Brick Bay Folly Competition

Each year the Brick Bay Sculpture Trust invites proposals for large-scale projects and installations that explore contemporary interpretations of the architectural folly. Follies are found all over the world - ornamental structures that deliberately lack utilitarian purpose, instead focusing on conceptual experimentation to inspire and delight audiences.

The aim of the Brick Bay Folly competition is to encourage students and emerging designers to explore the intersections between architecture and sculpture and their increasing overlap. But even more importantly, folly projects provide a fantastic opportunity for emerging architects to test their ideas on a real life project, manage construction, solve contingencies and participate in physical construction.

The process is as important as the result, with the winning submission receiving a grant and technical assistance, and, once complete, exposure that might not otherwise have been available to them. With dedicated Folly sites at Brick Bay, each winning design is exhibited for up to three years. Brick Bay wishes to acknowledge the crucial mentoring and sponsorship provided by the organisations listed below, without which the Folly competition could not go ahead.

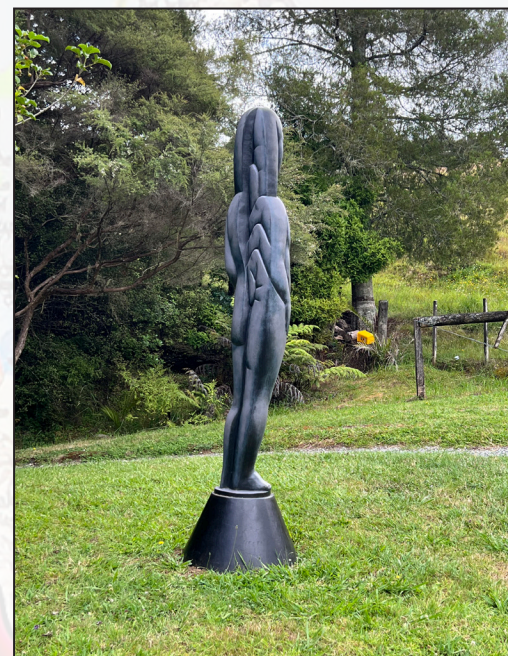
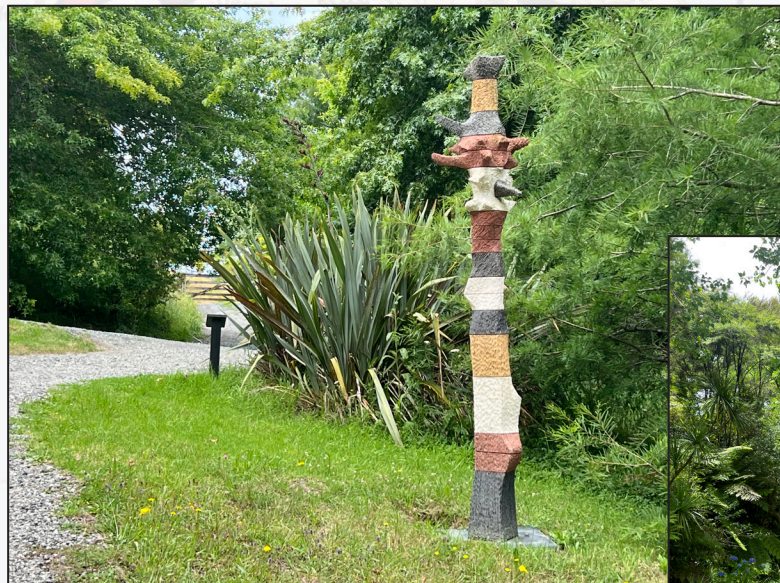




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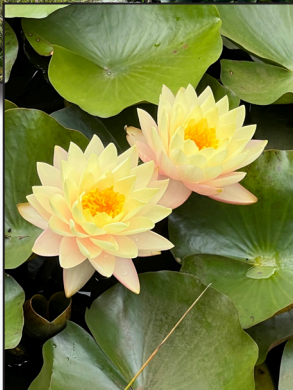
~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~



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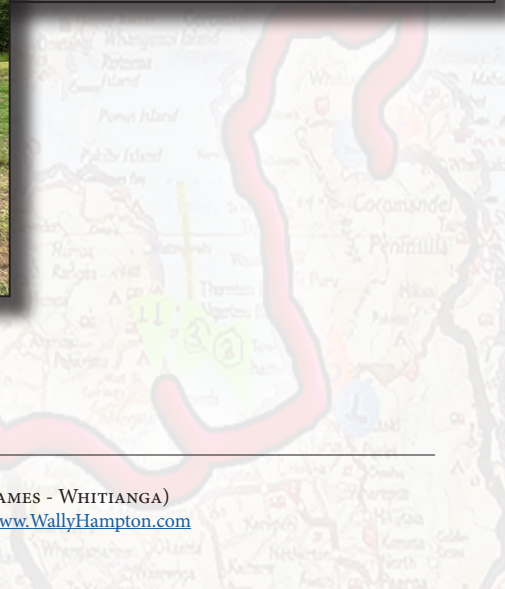
SEEING IS BELIEVING



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~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~



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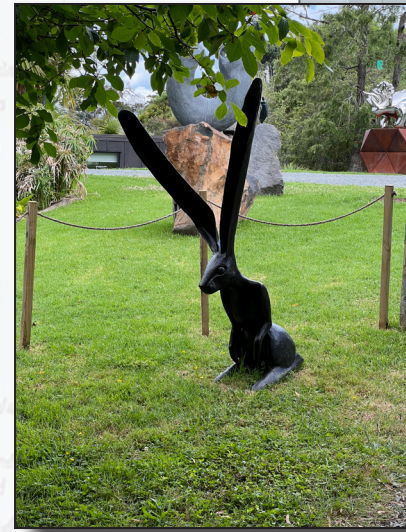
~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~



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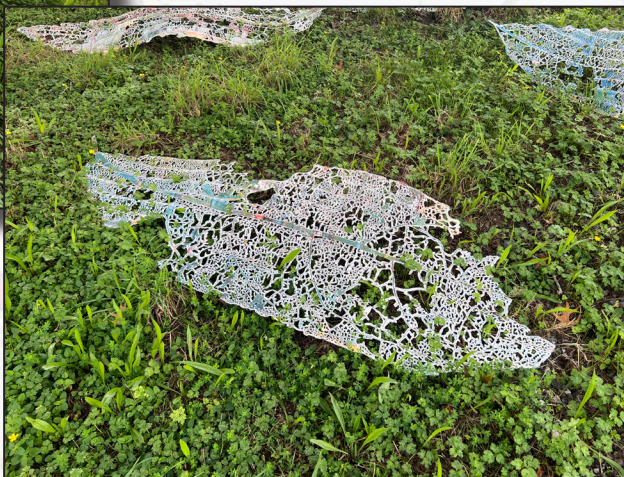
~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~



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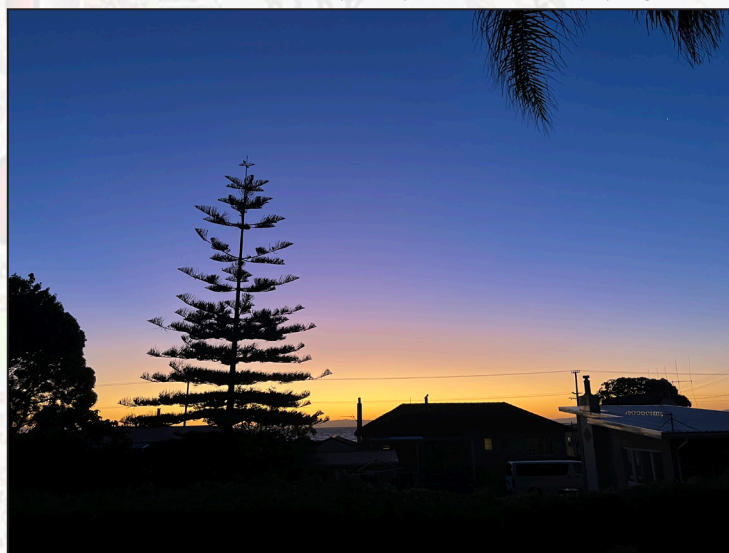
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~ The Brick Bay Winery Sculpture Trail ~



After spending the Christmas holiday in the Snells Beach area we headed south, back through Auckland to the Coromandel Peninsula. We made our way safely, without physical damage to either us, our rental car or others though the traffic of Auckland, to our next base camp, the small town of Thames. We stayed in Thames primarily because of its close proximity to the Pūkoro Kororo Miranda Shorebird Centre. We made a couple trips out to the shorebird center over our couple days stay at Thames, enjoying some nice bird watching and bird photo opportunities.

It was in Thames that we finally acquired a cooler for our foods during our trip. One would think that would have been easy, but first off they are not called coolers, or ice chests or anything we thought to call them. I had to find something like what we wanted in a window or find someone that had one and then ask what they were called. I don't remember who or where I actually found to ask, but they are called *Chilly Bins* if hard sided and *Chilly Bags* if soft sided. And once we knew the correct name we were directed to a sporting good store where there was a nice selection of different sized and configurations. We ended up with an appropriate *Chilly Bag* to keep our foods "chilly".



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With a population of about 7,000, Thames seemed like a pretty sleepy and quiet town, but when the weekend came it became very busy with lots of unique shops. We missed the popular steampunk festival here but one can still feel that vibe and evidence of that in the town.

The steampunk festival has an interesting web site at: <https://steampunkthethames.co.nz>

If you want to know what steampunk is, or just learn more, here is a link to some information on Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steampunk>



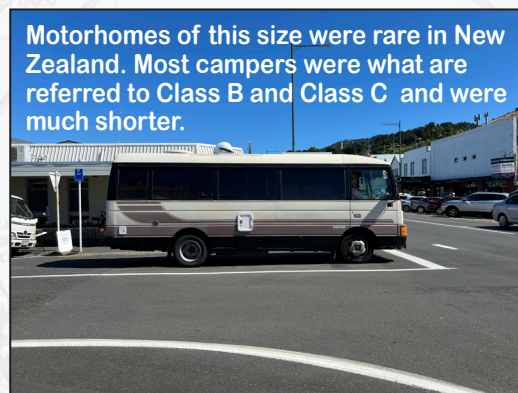
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We happened across this military grade flight simulator game room in Thames. While each player had VR glasses on, we could see what they were seeing on the screen above and in front of them. You can choose from a variety of iconic aircraft, including WWII warbirds like the Spitfire or Mustang and modern jets like the F-16 and F-18. It was so popular reservations were required so I didn't get a chance to try it out.



Motorhomes of this size were rare in New Zealand. Most campers were what are referred to as Class B and Class C and were much shorter.



We took a ride on the famous Drive Creek Railway (DCR) to the mountain viewing platform called the "Eyefull Tower". The line was built by the potter Barry Brickell on property acquired in 1961 and added to. Barry was aiming to start a pottery collective. He started construction of the 15-inch gauge rail line in 1975, using it to transport clay and fire wood fuel to his kiln. The DCR was slowly expanded over the next 25 years to become one of the very few completely new railway lines in New Zealand. Barry died in 2016, but the attraction lives on and now brings over 30,000 people to ride the railway per year, with much of the proceeds funding nature conservation works.

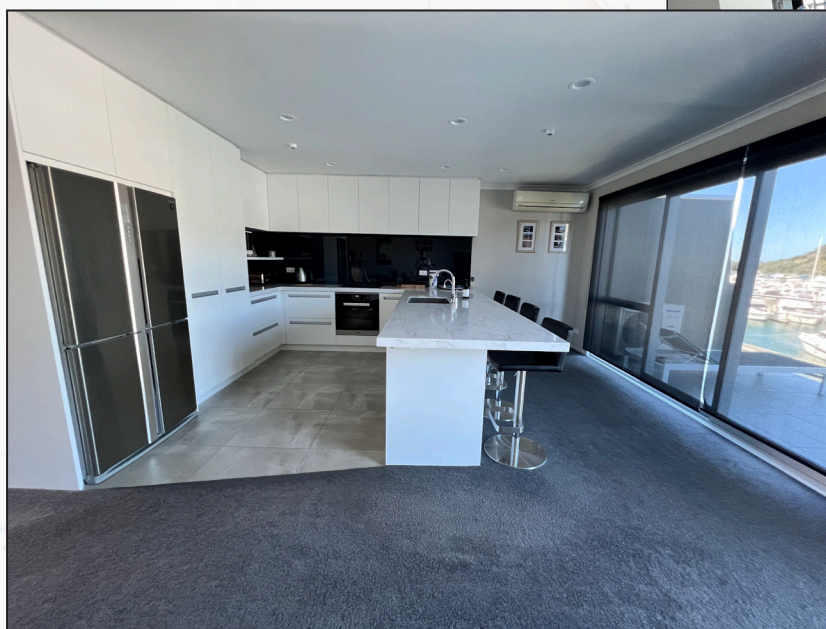


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After a short visit to the Drive Creek Railway we traversed over the Coromandel Peninsula to the west side and a bit south to our next base camp in Whitianga.

Our base camp in Whitianga was probably the most up scale place we stayed at on the trip. It was a condo overlooking a nice marina and, as with most of our stays, within easy walking distance of grocery stores and restaurants.



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We missed out on an pelagic birding excursion in Whitianga due to rough seas but otherwise enjoyed our time there.

From the balcony I enjoyed that the local airport flight path brought some unusual aircraft over for me to photograph.

NEW ZEALAND WARBIRO
NORTH AMERICAN AT-6D HARVARD III
WHITIANGA, NEW ZEALAND



The electrical outlets in New Zealand have on/off switches on them, something we had not seen before. I seemed like a nice safety feature to us.

It was easy to just hang out in the condo during most of our stay. There was great views and a few birds to photograph from the balcony. There was a Kingfisher that lived in the area and gave me several opportunities to photograph it. As I've mentioned before, there will be a future travelogue devoted just to the resulting bird photographs on our New Zealand travels.

Our days in Whitianga were very relaxing. It was the kind of place... well... if we were to live in New Zealand, why not here... and in THIS condo!

With all the facilities of the condo, we did a lot of our own cooking, caught up on our chores requiring the Internet and ended our stay with all clean clothes going forward. We tried not to have this base camp set the standard for our base camps for the rest of the trip... but...

New Zealand Warbird
1939 Goodyear FG-1D Corsair



FIRE EMERGENCY		
THIS BRIGADE IS PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY THESE EMPLOYERS OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS		
Ngā mihi maiaha ki a koutou		
Acumen Construction	HEB Construction	Morton's Garage
Athenree Life	Hume Pack-N-Cool	Oceanagold NZ Ltd
Auto Super Shoppe	J Cooper Transport	
Booth's Transport	J Swap	Summerset By The Sea
Central Kids Kindergarten	Just Avocados Ltd	Tiny House Builder Ltd
Chris Morley Consulting	Katikati Building Supplies Ltd	Uzabuz Ltd
Fruitometry	Katikati College	Westpac NZ
Gavin Amrein Contracting	Luxury Airport Shuttles	Western Bay Air Conditioning

We saw this kind of sign in many of the small towns and villages.

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