

NEW ZEALAND 2025 - PART XVI

PARAPARAUMU - WHANGANUI - OHAKUNE - NEW PLYMOUTH - HAMILTON - AUCKLAND

We lucked out with calm seas again for the voyage across Cook Strait. After collecting all our luggage at the Wellington ferry terminal we walked next door to the rental car agency for our next ride, a small Mitsubishi SUV.

We were greeted in Paraparaumu, our next place of stay, by sheep. It seemed appropriate for New Zealand. This was the first time on the trip and we had already stayed in over 40 different lodgings. It should be a sign of something, but we were not sure of just what.

The stay in Paraparaumu was in a B&B called the Aston Road Villa Bed & Breakfast, the only time we stayed in one

on this trip. It was one of our favorite lodgings in terms of the hosts and getting to know another couple, Louise and Dean. They have one apartment for guests, more like an attached ADU, where their children stayed when they visited and otherwise rented it out to vagabonds like us.

We enjoyed a few more in-depth conversations with them that we typically had with others on this trip.

The apartment had lots of nice art books, which eventually cost us as we wanted copies of them for ourselves once we returned home. A few are still listed on our gift lists to each other.

Sunset over Kapiti Island, a predator-free sanctuary for endemic birds, including many endangered birds. The full original name for the island is Te Waewae-Kapiti-o-Tara-rāua-ko-Rangitāne.

Kapiti Island is one of New Zealand's *coastal habitats of significance for indigenous birds*. It provides predator-free nesting habitat to little blue penguins, red-billed gulls, white-fronted terns and reef herons. There are also some threatened and at risk species on the island.

Visitors must have a permit to land on the island, usually arranged via tour operators. The eastern shore is limited to a maximum of 100 visitors per day and the north end is limited to 60 visitors per day. Visitors are generally not allowed to stay overnight. However, there is a private lodge at on the north end of the island, operated by Kapiti Island Nature Tours where visitors can stay overnight. It would be another place where one could potentially see Kiwi in the wild, typically at night.

The 1973 film *Island of Spirits* explores the history of the island from being a base for a Māori to being the site of whaling stations and then its transition to a bird sanctuary. The 2005 film *King Kong* was filmed partly on Kapiti Island. The island was also used as a location in a 2021 film called *Poppy*.

I don't remember the circumstances, but we were not able to go to Kapiti Island on this trip... maybe next trip.

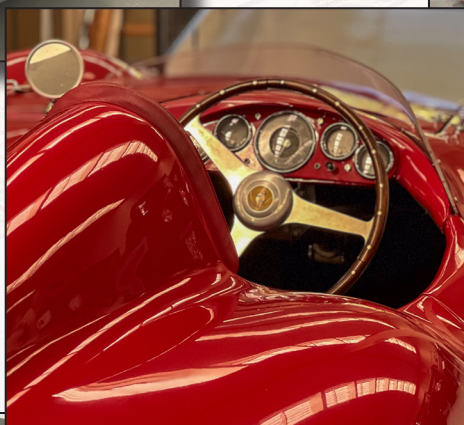


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We found another car collection museum in Paraparaumu, The Southward Car Museum. This collection was started by Sir Len and Lady Vera Southward, a couple that shared a love of engineering, motoring and speed. A speed enthusiast, Sir Len built and raced the legendary speedboat Redhead, becoming the first person in Australasia to exceed 100 mph on water in 1953 and later setting a new record at 109.9 mph. These achievements earned him national acclaim and reflected the relentless determination that would shape his legacy, not just on the water, but in a lifelong journey devoted to preserving motoring history. A large part of this collection reflected their love of speed.

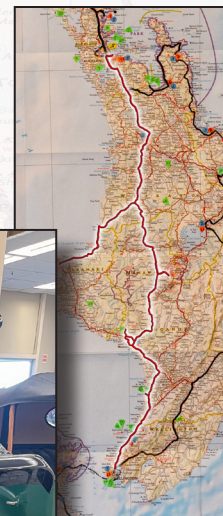
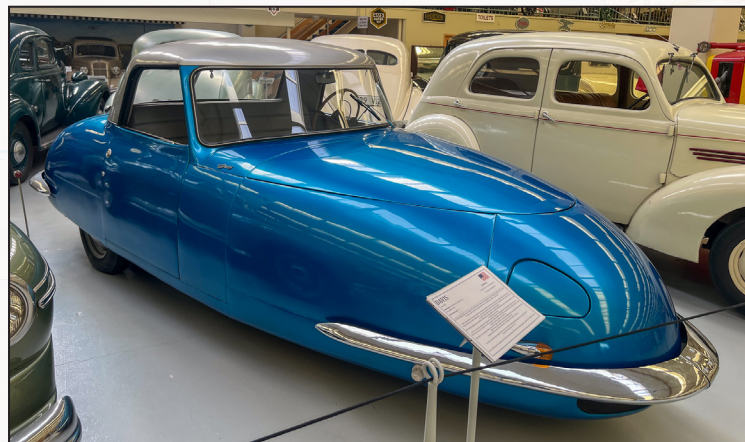
They had a 1955 Porsche 550 Spider (photo below). One of my favorite actors James Dean died while driving his own that he raced and nicknamed *Li'l Bastard*. He was on his way to a race, driving *Li'l Bastard* and was involved in an auto accident near Paso Robles in California.



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The museum had some pretty unusual cars too, like the early EV to the right.



This remarkable cars body was hand beaten out of copper by Mr Philip Lewis of Auckland in 1921. Mr Lewis bought a new Dodge in 1920 and then transformed it by adding new bodywork beaten out of copper and brass. The bodywork took 1000 hours to complete and the car made its public debut in the Queen Street Christmas Eve parade of 1921 in Auckland.



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On the way to our next lodging in Whanganui we stopped for lunch in the Dutch themed town of Foxton. The 50 or so flax mills that once operated in Foxton's vicinity slowly disappeared before WWII. The Feltex carpet factory closed in 2008 causing significant unemployment. Once an industrious flax industry town, Foxton had to reinvent itself. These days, Foxton is trying to create a new local economy based on tourism with several museums and galleries focused on the indigenous Māori culture and the past flax industry.

Nearby Foxton Beach is a popular holiday destination due mainly to its beach but we had noted the Manawātū Estuary bird sanctuary there in our travel research and made a stop there for some birding time before we continued on to Whanganui.



Whanganui is also spelled Wanganui. In Māori 'wh' is pronounced in a way that to non-locals sounds the same. Primarily due to this there is a local controversy over how to spell it as referendums voted one way and government agencies choose another, favoring traditional Māori preferences. Both are acceptable but the controversy continues.

There seemed to be a vibrant art community in Whanganui, lots of galleries, studios, street art and nice museums.



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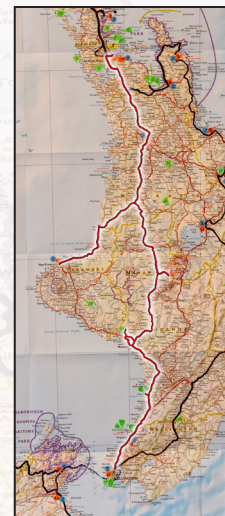
This show of hats immediately made us think of our friend Ollie and how he would have thoroughly enjoyed it... and adding many of these to his own collection of unusual hats. Ollie, this page is dedicated to the thought of you wearing these to our Rose Garden gatherings.



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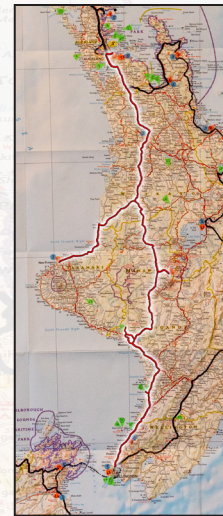
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Like so many New Zealand cities, towns, and villages of all sizes, Wanganui also had plenty of painted buildings. Here I felt the paintings had a sort of style or subject matter connection to each other. In retrospect, it might be the case where each town's paintings did as well but I had just not noticed.



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One of our day trips out of Whanganui was to Bushy Park Forest Reserve and Bird Sanctuary. We found lots of extended views of several species and some pretty good photography opportunities too.

We stopped by to visit the black sand and cliffs of Kai Iwi beach, (also called Mowhanau).

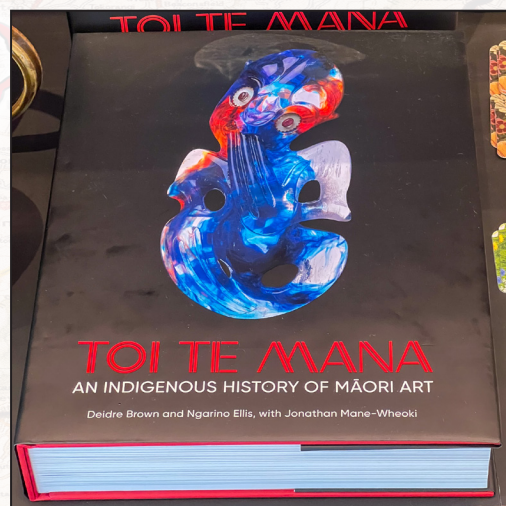


Birds of Bushy Park Sanctuary

As a predator free sanctuary, Bushy Park is a safe haven for many of New Zealand's native birds. As you walk the tracks keep your eyes and ears open for these national treasures.



Seeing this book in the Whanganui Regional Museum would eventually bring us to purchase it for our own library once we returned home. A great source of Māori art information.



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On our way to our next stop Tongariro National Park, a two night stay, we stopped to see the Hapuawhenua Viaduct. Originally built in 1908, it is an abandoned piece of Zealand's early railway history. Restored and opened to the public for walking and cycling in 2009 and now part of the Old Coach Road and Nga Haeranga, the New Zealand bicycle trail network.

We stayed two stormy nights at a resort in Whakapapa Village at the park. The park is the oldest national park in New Zealand and the sixth national park established in the world.

During the daytimes hours on both days the wind and rain receded enough for us to explore the area. We explored some of the filming locations they used in filming for *The Lord of the Rings*. We drove to the top to visit the rough landscape of the ski area at the top. No snow there, but it was plenty cold making it a short visit for the grand views.



Since put out, last November 2025 they had a bad fire here and hikers were evacuated from the Tongariro Alpine Crossing area. Whakapapa Village where we stayed was also evacuated. The area of the fire ended up being over 6,900 acres.

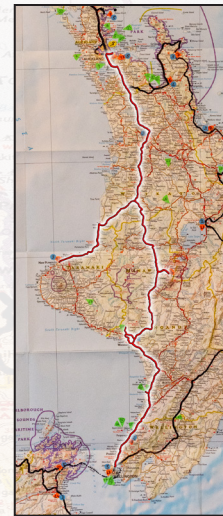


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On our way to New Plymouth we endured a bit more bad weather, which made our choice not to take the 92 mile (148 km) *Forgotten World Highway* (State Highway 43) much easier. Driving the highway takes up to 3 hours, as it passes through rugged countryside. It climbs three passes, and take you through the Moki Tunnel, also known as Hobbit's Hole and through the Tangarakau Gorge. The highway has been ranked as one of the 10 worst roads in New Zealand. While research prior to the trip indicated that portions of the road were unpaved (which we were not allowed to drive on in the rental car) local research after we arrived in this area indicated that the last unpaved area was recently paved. In any case, due to the weather we chose the longer way around to New Plymouth.

As it was, the main 'highway' north of New Plymouth (Highway 3) going through the beautiful Awakino gorge (prone to closure by land and rock slides) was a pretty dangerous section of highway on it's own. Only one narrow lane each way, very winding, beautifully distracting scenery, wet roads, and a few impatient drivers made it less enjoyable than it should have been. We saw the aftermath of a substantial accident caused by one or more of those factors too, giving us even more reason to focus on the driving. We would come back this way in a few days and hoped the weather would allow us a easier and more enjoyable drive.



The weather in New Plymouth was good at times and not-so-good at others. We enjoyed the city, our central location, and city walks but the weather kept us from the day trips to the nearby Te Papa-Kura-o-Taranaki mountain and national park we had planned. We could sense the fall weather patterns and the end of our New Zealand days coming to an end.



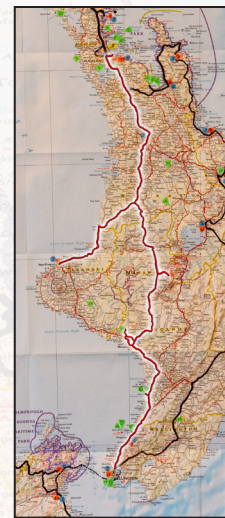
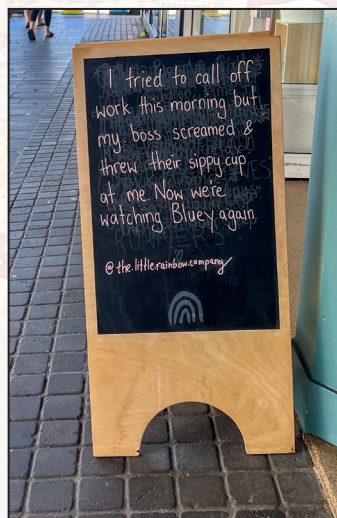
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New Plymouth also had it's own themed painted buildings.



New Plymouth has a very popular 2 mile (13 km) waterfront walk. This sculpture had an empty spot to sit at and is a very popular photo spot.



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We left New Plymouth for our next stay in Hamilton, going back up highway 3 all the way to Hamilton. We had much better weather on the traverse of the Awakino gorge and were able to stop a few places to bird and explore along the way.

The room to the right is typical of kind of lodging we stayed in throughout our New Zealand travels. These worked perfectly for us as we typically would prepare our own breakfasts and re-heated many left-over dinners, the same life-style as home in many ways.

Sunny weather returned for our days in Hamilton. The highlight of the stay was exploring Hamilton Gardens.



Hamilton Gardens is a 130 acre public garden park on the banks of the Waikato River. It includes enclosed gardens, open lawns, a lake, a nursery, a convention centre and the Hamilton East Cemetery. It is the Waikato region's most popular visitor attraction, attracting more than 1 million people and hosting more than 2,000 events a year.

Hamilton Gardens is described as a botanical garden, but does not technically qualify as a botanical garden. Instead, the site features 28 gardens representing the art, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions of different civilizations or historical garden styles. These gardens are grouped into the Paradise, Productive, Fantasy, Cultivar and Landscape garden collections, and there is space for gardens which are still in development.

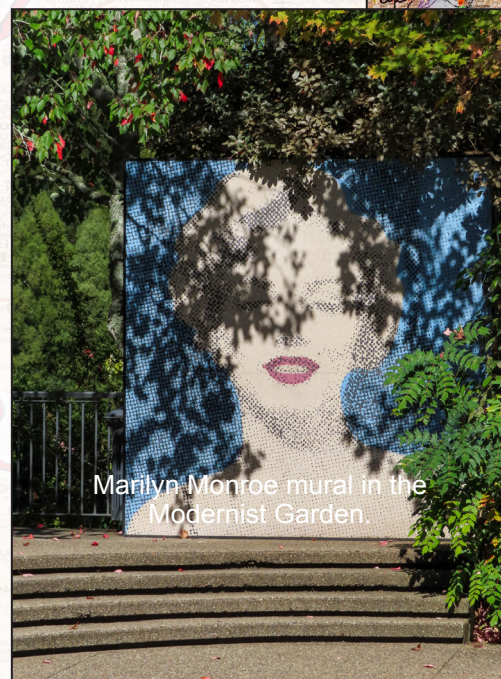
Hamilton Gardens



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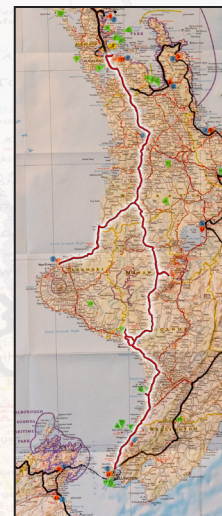
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Hamilton Gardens



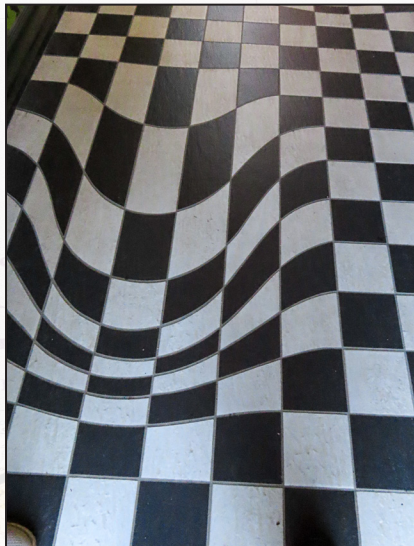
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Hamilton Gardens



This abstract tile floor was a bit disorientating to walk on.



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After over four months circumnavigation (via car) around the north and south islands of New Zealand we arrived back in Auckland. Our lodging was the very same apartment we had when we first started our adventure back in December. We had a final few days before we caught a ride back to Los Angeles on a repositioning cruise ship. We jettisoned some of the things we purchased for our New Zealand days that would not be necessary for the rest of our travel back to Poulsbo. We would leave our beloved *Chilly Bag* (cooler in local USA terms) and contents as well as all our other food items for the hotel staff to enjoy. Our travel dinner wear, cutlery and such would have to find a new home too.



For a few more days Wendy could have her daily world class Latte Art made by New Zealand's Latte Art Champion Hoony Chae, while I acquired enough of Hoony's coffee to make my own French press coffee for the 4 weeks back to Poulsbo. I didn't give up the coffee making equipment I'd acquired in New Zealand.



We got to eat again at a few of our favorite finds during our first days in Auckland too.

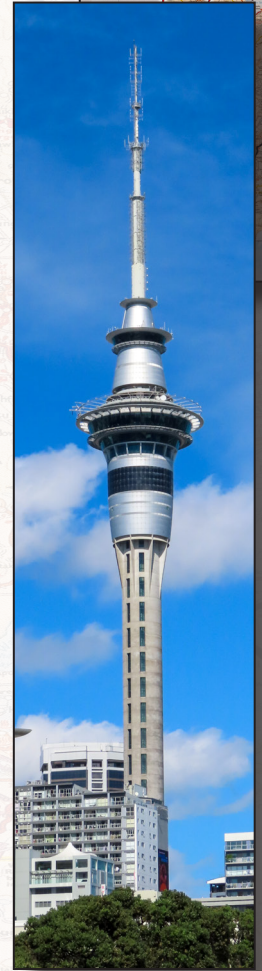
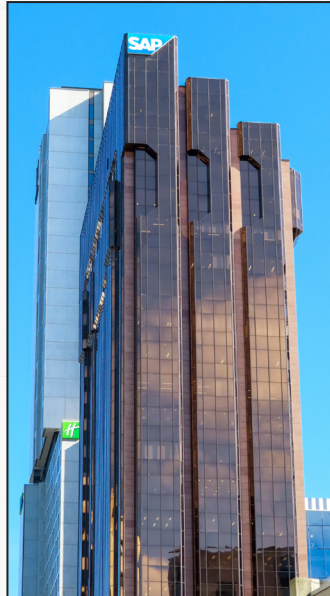
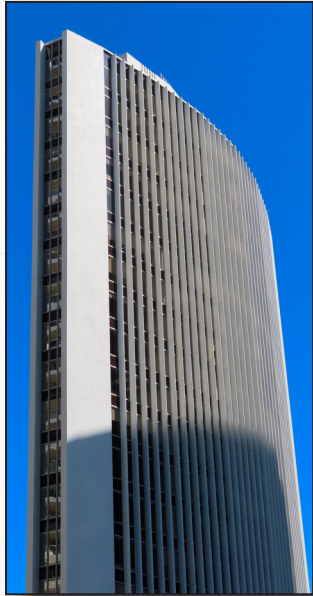


We picked up a few items that we thought we may have luggage space for and did a fair amount of window shopping on top of that.



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There seemed to be Chinese involvement in many of the building project we saw.

From our limited perspective, Chinese influence was no big deal and welcomed much more than it would be back in the USA.



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Along the waterfront near our apartment we saw a couple of behemoth cruise ships come and go, ships the size we would ride back to Los Angeles in a couple days. It was mildly terrifying to us but we told ourselves *we had come this far so let's see what it is like on a BIG ship.*

We saw this sign as we walked away from one of the ships... it meant something more than it would have otherwise.



The next travelogue will be photographs of the New Zealand birds we saw.

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