

An unexpected eighteen months in New Zealand

by Patricia Morgan

Julian and I left Cherbourg on our yacht A Capella of Belfast in October 2017 planning to sail around the world. We arrived in Whangarei in late October 2019 after a fabulous two years in the Caribbean, the East coast of the USA and the Pacific.

We had a great welcome. The customs and immigration officials were courteous, helpful and super-efficient, and the marina manager gave my husband a lift up to the local shops where he could pick up a curry, whisky and Prosecco. Much though we loved the Pacific, it was a relief to arrive back to the First World.

At this point we only expected to stay in New Zealand for six months before heading to Australia in order to complete our circumnavigation. Little did we know that we would have an enforced stay for eighteen months, due to the pandemic, and we would really get to know and love New Zealand. We travelled extensively by yacht, plane, car and camper van.

So, what were our favourite bits?

The Walking

The walking infrastructure in New Zealand is just fantastic - great tracks, helpful wardens, huts, good signage and information. We enjoyed numerous day walks throughout both islands and completed some of the iconic great walks - Tongariro crossing, Abel Tasman, Queen Charlotte and Heaphy Great Walks. The variety, the vegetation, the bird-life and scenery are wonderful. We just loved it and became very fit.



The Boatyards

It is difficult to be enthusiastic about boatyards; but keeping a blue water cruising yacht in excellent condition is hard work and a never ending job. The New Zealanders are experts, and despite our European fittings they seem to find a way to fix and improve most things.

Sailing

New Zealand is a fabulous cruising area. We sailed up to Parengarenga right near Cape Reinga, and down to the South Island. We visited the iconic Bay of Islands, the Hauraki Gulf and numerous anchorages and islands along the way. We were particularly lucky to be in New Zealand for the America's Cup, and thoroughly enjoyed the great viewing and entertainment.

In the South Island we spent time in Picton in The Queen Charlotte Sound, celebrated Christmas 2020 in Nelson and finally spent some time in the Pelorus Sound. We had a great time in Havelock, the green lipped mussel capital of the world. We were introduced to a new snack - pickled green lipped mussels on a cracker - just yummy! The scenery is huge and breath-taking.



A Camper Van in the Winter near Queenstown

Living on the boat in the winter is a challenge so we took the opportunity to hire a camper van for a month in August from Queenstown. Camper vans were then very reasonably priced as a result of the border closures. We had a fabulous month visiting Milford Haven and Doubtful Sound, as usual in the rain, and the glaciers near Mt Cook. There were no tourists, so we found ourselves in the most amazing campsites nearly always on our own. A highlight was deer stalking. This necessitated staying up the mountains near Glenorchy in a tiny mountain hut. It was extremely cold, but our wonderful stalker kept the little pot belly stove going all night. As I hardly need to say the scenery and views were sensational.

In June 2021 we shipped A Capella of Belfast home by cargo ship. Of all the places to be stuck during a pandemic, New Zealand in 2020/21 must have been the best. We had the most fabulous time and must thank the New Zealanders for their unfailing generosity.

