

Sunday, January 4, 2026 – Tahiti

La Orana and Happy New Year from Polynesia, commonly thought of as Paradise, which lies in the central South Pacific. We're not quite at the end of the world, but it's definitely right around the corner. We arrived this morning for the start of our longest trip ever; we'll be away for five weeks. So be forewarned: following this series of travel journals will require commitment and endurance.

We're traveling with our friends Lois and Andy Soowal, who plan on heading home about halfway through. Maybe five weeks is overdoing it? Or maybe they're the smart ones. Time will tell.



Paris, but with fewer Muslims and more

palm trees.

After flying for what seemed like a hundred hours and then settling into our hotel, we embarked on a guided walking tour of the central area of the main town and capital, Papeete (pah-pay-EH-tay), because apparently rest is for other people. Since it's Sunday, nearly everything was closed, but we still got a good orientation to the region and learned about its history. Mostly from the outside of locked buildings.



Our journey begins in Tahiti, the largest island in the Society Islands. Tahiti was formed by volcanic activity and originally settled by Polynesians over a thousand years ago. It later became a focal point of French colonial interest in the 18th century and remains a French overseas territory today. Its culture blends traditional Polynesian customs—dance, tattooing, and outrigger canoeing with French influences, creating a unique and colorful island identity.

Think



Tahiti is part of French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity of France, yet sits more than 9,300 miles from Paris. Talk about long-distance governance. Time also behaves differently here; "island time" is very real. Tahiti lies so far east, just on our side of the International Date Line, that it's almost a full day behind Europe, making it one of the very last places on Earth to welcome a new day. Procrastinators, take note.

Monday, January 5, 2026 – Tahiti

Today we toured all around Tahiti Island, visiting a lighthouse, black sandy beaches, waterfalls, caves, surf spots, and botanical





gardens, basically checking every box on the “yes, this is still paradise” list. Along the way, we also learned about the real challenges of Tahitian society. Not all is paradise in Paradise. Incomes are low, jobs are scarce, the social safety net is minimal, everything is expensive, and there are mixed feelings about French rule. Despite this, Tahitians seem remarkably adept at getting along with little. Or perhaps they’ve simply perfected the art of perspective. Either way, it helps that the beaches and scenery are, inconveniently, spectacular.

Tuesday, January 6, 2026 – Tahiti

You can’t go to Tahiti and *not* get in the water, so first thing this morning Andy and I went scuba diving. Lori and

Lois later joined us to snorkel while we did a second dive. We saw lots of sea turtles and even a wrecked aeroplane (French spelling) resting on the ocean floor. Apparently even shipwrecks get an upgrade here.

Afterwards, we made our way to the port and boarded the Oceania Riviera for the start of an eighteen-day cruise through the South Pacific, which eventually ends in Auckland, New Zealand.



Wednesday,  
January 7,  
2026 –  
Moorea,  
French  
Polynesia



Overnight we sailed the short distance to Moorea, a stunning island just northwest of Tahiti. Moorea is also part of French Polynesia’s Society Islands and shares strong cultural and historical ties with Tahiti. Despite its proximity, Moorea maintains a quieter, more rural character, including traditional Polynesian activities of fishing and farming.

We got back in the water in the morning during a half-day snorkeling trip. At the first stop, we stood in chest-deep water while sharks and stingrays casually swam around us. At the second stop, we swam with more sea turtles than I’ve ever seen before, plus additional rays for good measure. The third stop featured schools of fish weaving through coral reefs. It was an excellent morning, after which we reluctantly returned to the ship to rest from all the relaxation.





Thursday, January 8, 2026 - Huahine, French Polynesia

Huahine (hoo-ah-HEE-nay), which means “pregnant woman” in Polynesian, named for the profile of its four mountains, is one of the less-developed gems of the Society Islands. Huahine has a deep-rooted Polynesian history, with some of the region’s best-preserved marae (sacred temples) and archaeological sites. Its culture remains strongly traditional, centered on fishing, farming, and community life, all of which we observed on a tour around the island. We then took a boat ride around Huahine and enjoyed a Polynesian lunch on a beach, feet in the sand, while stingrays glided through the shallow water nearby. Rough day. Truly exhausting.

With Love, Lori and Stephen

Friday, January 9, 2026 - Bora Bora, French Polynesia

Bora Bora, often hailed as the "Pearl of the Pacific," is a small island in the Leeward group of the Society Islands, renowned for its stunning turquoise lagoon. It's so beautiful here they named it twice. Formed by a volcanic caldera, the island is surrounded by a barrier reef and motus (small coral islets), with the dramatic peak of Mount Otemanu rising at its center. Bora Bora was also a strategic base for the U.S. during World War II. Today, it blends its rich cultural traditions with a luxurious tourism industry, making it one of the most celebrated destinations in the South Pacific.



Our luck continued this morning when Andy and I dove while Lori and Lois snorkeled above us. Our first dive was with manta rays, which can be hit or miss; you may not see any. Well, we saw *a lot* of them, gliding past and circling us. It was spectacular. The second dive was over a reef. We saw several sharks, but Lori and Lois had a better show with schools of sharks swimming all around them. Sometimes snorkeling is better than diving. Everyone returned to the boat with all their arms and legs accounted for, which we consider to be a successful outing.

Saturday, January 10, 2026 – Raiatea, French Polynesia

Raiatea is known as the Sacred Island. It's considered the spiritual heart of Polynesia and the legendary launching point for ancient voyagers who settled much of the Pacific. We did a boat tour around part of the island, riding along the shore and up part of the only navigable river in Polynesia. Then we visited a pearl farm to learn how oysters are coaxed into growing pearls, with its obligatory gift shop. On the way back we rode by the UNESCO-listed Taputapuātea marae, one of the most important ancient ceremonial sites in the Pacific. No gift shop there.

Sunday, January 11, 2026 – At Sea

Today was a much-welcomed day at sea, a chance to sleep in and relax. I never thought I'd be saying that, but after waking up before 7:00am for the last week to start early tours, it's true. Maybe I'm getting old.

Monday, January 12, 2026



We're finished with the islands of French Polynesia and were supposed to visit the Cook Islands today. However, the seas were too rough, and the ship's captain determined it wasn't safe to go ashore on the tender boats. Therefore, our visit to Aitutaki was cancelled. We did, however, get to look at it from our balcony. Unfortunately, I can't count that in my list of visited countries. Instead of snorkeling in crystal clear water, strolling on white sandy beaches on uninhabited islands, and enjoying lunch on the beach, we spent the day at sea on the ship. All this relaxing is killing me.



Tuesday, January 13, 2026 – At Sea

Another planned day at sea. I'm starting to worry that my schedule is becoming dangerously stress-free. At least I have these journals to write!

Lori and Stephen

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 - Pago Pago, American Samoa

We're finally on dry land, after three days at sea. Needless to say, we are *very* relaxed at this point. This morning we arrived in Pago Pago, the capital of American Samoa, a United States unincorporated territory, where its residents are U.S. nationals, but not U.S. citizens by birth. They can live and work anywhere in the U.S., but they can't vote in U.S. presidential elections unless they become naturalized citizens. American Samoa blends traditional Samoan customs with American governance and infrastructure. Interestingly, American Samoans serve in the US military at the highest per capita rate of any group.



Pago Pago is nestled on the deepest natural harbor in the world on the island of Tutuila, which is what made it strategically attractive to the United States. Surrounded by lush, steep volcanic mountains, including the iconic Rainmaker Mountain, Pago Pago is both the territory's administrative center and main port. Pago Pago plays a central role in island life, with a local market, a busy tuna fishing industry that's home to Starkist Tuna and Charlie the Tuna, and cultural events that showcase the strong community values, music, dance, and storytelling traditions of the Samoan people.

We toured around the island on a bus which surely would not have passed any basic safety inspection anywhere. We started at the National Park visitors

center for the only US national park in the Southern Hemisphere, then stopped at a lookout to view the beautiful Pola Island and learn about some of the Samoan ways of life. After heading over the Afono Pass for an up-close look at Rainmaker Mountain and a terrific view of the harbor, we descended into the National Park villages of Afono and Vatia, the ancestral village of Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa.

Before dinner we went to a community cultural show featuring several local groups performing Samoan dances and music. Samoan people take enormous pride in their heritage and have a very strong sense of community, religion and family. Family is so important





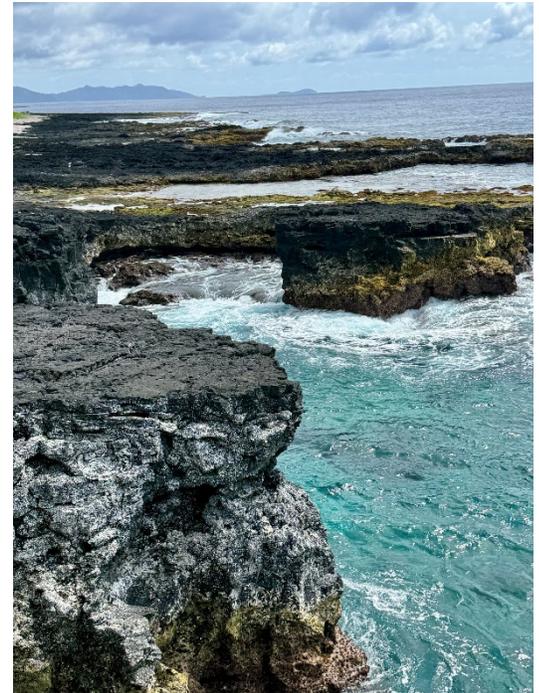
that they typically bury their dead relatives in their front yards, rather than in cemeteries, so they can continue to care for them.

Thursday, January 15, 2026 - Pago Pago, American Samoa

Today we toured the western side of Tutuila island with the same tour company as yesterday on one of their other buses. Today's bus was falling apart slightly less than

yesterday's

bus, but that's not saying much. We heard about a lot of Samoan legends, including one about the Turtle and the Shark, which has a beautiful viewpoint overlooking the shore. We visited the Leone Tsunami Healing Garden, created to honor those killed by the 2009 tsunami which struck the area. No tour would be complete without a visit to a church, and we went to Zion's London Missionary Society Church, the first church built in American Samoa in the late nineteenth century. It's the church that our tour guide belongs to, and he treated us to a native song. We ended the tour at Pritchard's Bakery, the first business established in American Samoa where we all had some delicious bakery products.



*The Turtle and the Shark viewpoint*

After the tour we headed to Tish's Barefoot Bar, known for having the best pina colodas in the world, which we can attest to. We also had some of the best shrimp and wahoo for lunch I've ever tasted. Maybe it was

due to the relaxed vibe and looking at some of the prettiest scenery imaginable?



*With Candy Mann, co-owner of Tisa's with his wife Tisa. That's his real name.*

Tonight we cross the International Date Line, so our calendars will flip from Thursday, January 15, 2026 to Saturday, January 17, 2026. We will completely skip Friday, January 16. So enjoy your day, and think of us not having the



*View from Tisa's Barefoot Bar*

opportunity to experience January 16 like all of you.

Tomorrow, Saturday, January 17 is another day at sea for us as we head to Fiji. We're looking forward to sampling their water.

Love, Lori and Stephen

Sunday, January 18, 2026 - Suva, Fiji

This morning we docked in Suva, the capital of Fiji. Fiji was a British colony from 1874 until 1970, when it became an independent nation. The British legacy remains very visible: English is one of Fiji's official languages, they drive on the left side of the road, and order still seems to matter, at least on weekdays. Unfortunately, today was Sunday.

Suva is described as a bustling, multicultural city. That may well be true Monday through Saturday, but today it feels more like a ghost town visited by a cruise ship full of tourists looking for something to do. Most shops were closed. We wandered into one building



filled with stalls selling Fijian handicrafts, though it was difficult to determine whether they were made locally or had recently arrived via container ship from China. We then visited a department store where everything was definitely made in China with the notable exception of Fiji Water, which really is bottled here.

Our afternoon tour took us to the National Forest, home to a waterfall that everyone talks about but few people actually see. Thanks to slippery conditions, we joined the latter group. From there we drove to Nausori, a town where many shops are owned by descendants of Indian indentured servants who, over time, became entrepreneurs. The market, also subdued by Sunday, offered a look at daily life and underscored that Fiji is still very much a developing country. The day ended at the Fiji Museum, which presents Fiji's diverse heritage, blending Indigenous Fijian, Indian, and other Pacific Island influences, all



thankfully under one air-conditioned roof.

Monday, January 19, 2026 – Lautoka, Fiji

Today we docked in Lautoka, Fiji's second-largest city and known as the "Sugar City," thanks to its sugar cane industry and the massive Lautoka Sugar Mill. We drove through town en route to the Garden of the Sleeping Giant, a peaceful botanical garden featuring over 2,000 orchid varieties and tropical plants. It was once the private collection of actor Raymond Burr.

The next stop was the Sabeto Mud Pools & Hot Springs, a natural thermal spa famed for its cleansing and beautifying properties. I'm unconvinced about the beautifying part, but I am certain the photos will resurface someday when someone accuses us of blackface. I swear it was mud.





We then visited the colorful Sri Siva Subramaniya Temple in Nadi, the largest Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere and a welcome change of color after being covered in mud. This was followed by shopping and lunch in Nadi, and on the way back to the ship we stopped at Veseisei Village, believed to be where the first Fijians landed from Africa before spreading across the islands.



Tuesday, January 20, 2026 – Port Denarau, Fiji

After a few itinerary changes, which seem to have uniformly pissed off just about everyone onboard, we finally anchored at Port Denarau, Fiji, not far from where we had lunch yesterday. Clearly, we didn't cover a lot of nautical distance last night.

Andy and I took the tender ashore while Lori and Lois stayed on the ship. By the time we arrived, there weren't any activities available that we could actually do without immediately turning around and heading back, so we did what seasoned cruise passengers do best: wandered aimlessly around the port's shopping area.



Aside from the absence of a Señor Frog's, it could have been just about any port in the Caribbean: bars, jewelry stores, and t-shirt shops selling items no one has ever worn twice. Still, it was a change of scenery, so we're glad we went ashore.

Tomorrow and Thursday are sea days before we reach New Zealand on Friday. I'll resume once something happens, or at least when we're closer to land again.

Love Lori and Stephen

## South Pacific and New Zealand Travel Journal – Volume 5

Friday, January 23, 2026 – Auckland, New Zealand

After two days of sailing over 1,000 miles through open water (read: “rough seas”), we were *supposed* to arrive this morning in The Bay of Islands, New Zealand. However, about half an hour before our scheduled arrival time the ship’s captain announced that due to bad weather expected in Auckland tomorrow, we need to get there *today* to avoid not being able to get there by the scheduled end of the cruise. So we missed The Bay of Islands with its 144 islands dotted with secluded coves, pristine beaches, and lush subtropical forests, and diverted straight to Auckland.

This cruise has been... let’s call it *character-building*. The ship itself was great, the service excellent, the food delicious, and most of the ports we actually managed to visit were enjoyable. But between weather, port conditions, and the ever-changing itinerary, we missed a lot of the places we were originally supposed to visit.

Lesson reinforced: travel is an exercise in flexibility, patience, and adjusting expectations in real time. We made the best of it and appreciated what we *did* get to see. We are disappointed that Oceania didn’t set up *any* expectations that conditions could force all the changes that they made.



So we arrived in Auckland in the afternoon, one day ahead of schedule. Auckland is New Zealand's largest city, located on the North Island, known for its harbors, volcanic cones, and diverse population. Built on an isthmus between two harbors, it's a major economic hub with a mix of urban life and natural attractions like beaches, rainforests, and islands, and it has the world's largest Polynesian population. We rode around town on a Hop On Hop Off bus without getting off, defeating the purpose but giving us a good overview of Auckland. Then we met up with my brother Jerry and his girlfriend Jinda, who will accompany us for another two weeks as we travel through New Zealand.

Saturday, January 24, 2026 - Auckland, New Zealand

This morning we did a walking tour around Auckland before taking our tour guide’s recommendation for the best meat pies in town for lunch. These are not your typical hot pockets, but the sacred national cuisine, and they lived up to the hype. After lunch, because we’re so cultured, we went to the art museum for a look at some French Impressionist and Māori paintings. Shopping wouldn’t be complete without some merch from the best rugby team in the world, New Zealand’s All Blacks.

Sunday, January 25, 2026 - Auckland

We disembarked the ship this morning and checked into a hotel in Auckland for another couple of nights. Our daughter Julia flew in and met us, because she doesn’t



pass on a trip for which her parents are paying. Due to the bad weather in the US, Andy and Lois, scheduled to fly home today, extended their stay in Auckland by two days.



In the afternoon we all took a ferry to Waiheke Island, a haven of world-class vineyards and idyllic beaches. We rode around the island on another Hop On Hop Off bus, visiting wineries, restaurants, and shops. We must have misunderstood the bus schedule, because the bus we were waiting for to get back to the ferry never came. Plan B kicked into place, and we took a public bus back to the ferry port with five minutes to spare.



Monday, January 26, 2026 - Auckland

Today we took a private tour to Auckland's West Coast. The first stop was the Arataki Visitor Centre, a gateway to Auckland's western region with a great view. The next stop was Karekare Falls, a beautiful waterfall

considered one of New Zealand's must-see natural attractions. A hike on the Mercer Bay Loop featured great views up and down the coast. The last stop was Piha Beach, one of Auckland's most famous west coast black sand beaches. The views were terrific, but our guide was a dud, only reading short descriptions of each stop from his phone to us. We got as much information from him as what I just gave to you in this paragraph. At least he drove well.



Love Lori and Stephen

Tuesday, January 27, 2026 - Auckland to Rotorua

Andy and Lois headed home today after extending their trip two extra days thanks to weather-related airline chaos in the U.S., so our group is now down to five. Lori, Julia, and I got an early start with a 5:45am pickup (we'll need a vacation after this trip!) for a one-way tour from Auckland to Rotorua. Jinda and Jerry took a different tour to meet us at the end of the day. Our first stop was for coffee and breakfast, where we learned that in New Zealand, meat pies aren't just for lunch. Hey, it's noon somewhere. We then continued on to the glowworm caves of Waitomo where we walked and floated on a boat through a huge underground cave, enveloped in the light of millions of shining glowworms. Appropriately, I wore my Explorer II watch, the choice of speleologists, so I knew what time it was locally and at home for the hour we were in the cave.



We ended in Rotorua, known for its dramatic geothermal landscapes, sulfur odors everywhere in town, and thriving Māori community, around lunchtime. Māori people are the indigenous Polynesian

people of Aotearoa (New Zealand), known for their rich culture, language, distinctive art (including tattooing and carving), and powerful performances like the haka (war dance). Descended from East Polynesian voyagers who arrived centuries ago, they developed a distinct culture with deep connections to the land, traditions, and spiritual beliefs, emphasizing community, ancestry, and family.



In the afternoon we went to Rotorua's Redwood Forest for a treetops walk that features 28 suspension bridges between the trees at heights that range from 30 to 66 feet. It offered a unique perspective of the forest, which includes 120-year-old giant Redwoods and exotic flora and fauna, assuming you're not focused on the structural integrity of

narrow bridges swaying every time you take a step. From there we went to Rotorua Skyline, where we took a gondola to the top of the mountain for magnificent views and luge rides, because nothing says "nature appreciation" like gravity-powered plastic carts and competitive adults racing down a hill.



Wednesday, January 28, 2026 - Rotorua

Our tour today took us first to Waiotapu, an active geothermal area with hot springs, bubbling mud pits, geysers, and other stinky natural wonders emitting sulfur gases. The next stop was Waimangu Volcanic Valley to see more active volcanic activity. After viewing a Māori war canoe, we went to Te Puia, the Māori Arts and Crafts Institute and site of more geothermal landscapes. They also have three kiwi birds in captivity in habitats that simulate nighttime, so the nocturnal birds are active for tourists. Everyone managed to spot them. Everyone except me. Apparently, I can fly across

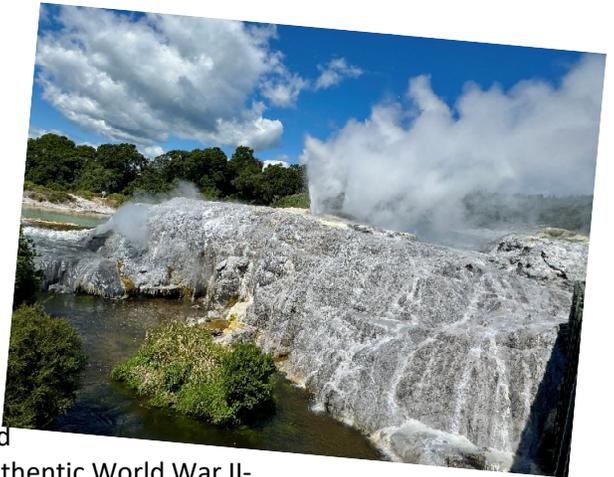


the world, navigate foreign cities, and survive multiple itinerary changes, but locating a national bird in a dark room is where my abilities end.

It was a wonderful day. We all made the mistake of wearing clean clothes, when we could have worn any of our clothes from the laundry pile and no one would know since the gases coming up from the ground smelled worse than anything we could have put on.

Thursday, January 29, 2026 – Rotorua

You've seen them in all the tourist areas and made fun of the people onboard. I'm talking about the "duck" boats that can travel on land and



water. We were those people this morning, sightseeing aboard an authentic World War II-era amphibious vehicle. We started with a city tour before splashing down into a couple of Rotorua's many scenic lakes.

It was actually fun, and I think I've found a new job for myself after I retire: a tour guide. I could come up with a few jokes and keep telling them over and over again to a new group of people. Like I do now.

Love Lori and Stephen



Friday, January 30, 2026 - Rotorua to Christchurch

We ended the day yesterday by visiting the world-famous Polynesian Spa, where Lori, Julia and I soaked in a natural hot spring pool overlooking beautiful Lake Rotorua. I don't care how good the smelly water is supposed to be for my skin, if the sulfur odor doesn't come out of my bathing suit and stinks up everything else in my luggage, I'm going to be pissed.

After randomly running into some friends from Parkland in our hotel elevator, we went to dinner at a Mexican restaurant, because, when in Rome...why eat Italian? Texas barbecue? Yeah, we had that the night before.



We left Rotorua and New Zealand's North Island today and flew to Christchurch, the largest city in the South Island with probably the worst name possible for a city trying to welcome Jewish tourists. Surprisingly, there was absolutely no security at the Rotorua airport: no ID checks, no screening, no TSA, no plastic bins, no passive-aggressive instructions. Nothing. We basically just handed over our luggage and wandered onto the plane like it was 1974. Hopefully, there was

some good old-fashioned profiling going on behind the scenes, which is probably more effective than terrorizing grandmothers and toddlers by taking away their water.



Saturday, January 31, 2026 - Christchurch to Tekapo

After spending a total of sixteen hours in Christchurch, during which time we toured the city on a 143-year-old trolley and visited the central market a few times, we were picked up early this morning for the next leg of our journey, to Tekapo. The three-hour drive took us through the Canterbury Plains, stretching toward the Southern Alps, a patchwork of farmland and rivers that forms the heart of New Zealand's agricultural country. We stopped in Geraldine, a small South Canterbury town, for a

quick breakfast before continuing toward the high country and Lake Tekapo. Now we're seeing why New Zealand has a reputation for beautiful scenery, with its vivid turquoise lakes and snow-capped peaks.

Tekapo is part of the Aoraki Mackenzie Dark Sky Reserve, an area designated for its near-zero light pollution and therefore the spot for some of the best stargazing on Earth. After dropping our luggage at the hotel, we hiked the Mount John Summit Circuit, a two-hour hiking trail offering panoramic views of the Mackenzie Basin, Lake Tekapo, and the Southern Alps.

Afterwards, we rewarded ourselves with lunch at a lakeside café called TLV, the airport code for Tel Aviv.



Naturally, we assumed Mediterranean food. Turns out it stands for Tekapo Lake View. The food wasn't Mediterranean, but it was good. But honestly, after that hike, they could have served us cardboard and we'd have been happy.



After dinner we attempted some stargazing, but the full moon prevented the sky from getting dark enough to get the full effect. Timing is everything.

Sunday, February 1, 2026 - Tekapo to Mt Cook

This morning we traveled through the Mackenzie High Country, first stopping Lake Pukaki, one of New Zealand's most photographed lakes. Our luck was running high thanks to Julia, the luckiest person in the world; the weather was perfectly clear for us to see Aoraki/Mt Cook, the tallest mountain in New Zealand, beyond the vivid glacial waters.

We continued into the Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park where we hiked to the Tasman Glacier Viewpoint for beautiful views. Later in the day we took a Tasman Glacier Boat Tour which got us up close to the glacier face, but not before another half hour hike to the boat dock. I'm starting to feel it in my legs.

Monday, February 2, 2026 - Mt Cook to Queenstown

This morning we started off on a hike, but it looked like it was going to rain, so Lori and I turned back and did a guided off-road adventure in a custom-built Unimog, designed for backcountry exploration with large panoramic windows and overhead viewing panels. We went to Glentanner Station, a sheep farm on an



expansive stretch of high-country terrain rarely seen by visitors.



In the afternoon we had a one-way four-

hour drive to Queenstown with a few non-noteworthy stops along the way. More from Queenstown to follow in the days ahead.

Love, Lori and Stephen



Tuesday, February 3, 2026 – Queenstown

We began today as all great cultural immersions should begin: by drinking before noon. We took a wine tour through the Gibbston Valley, not far from Queenstown, visiting three wineries and New Zealand’s largest wine cave. Over the course of the day, we sampled *eighteen* different wines and enjoyed what was probably the best meal we’ve had so far in New Zealand at one of the wineries. I say “probably” because we were already eight samples deep by lunchtime, so our powers of critical judgment may have been impaired.

When we returned to Queenstown, Lori finished the nap she had started in the van, and Julia and I shared a burger at Fergburger, a Queenstown institution famous for its huge, gourmet burgers. It lived up to its hype; the two of us couldn’t finish one delicious burger. Granted, we had eaten lunch only a couple of hours earlier, but hunger seems to be unrelated to eating in this family.



Wednesday, February 4, 2026 - Queenstown

We were picked up early this morning for the four-hour drive to Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park. Milford Sound is famously one of the wettest places on earth, where it rains most days. Good thing we had lucky Julia with us, as the weather was perfect: clear and sunny the entire day. The drive itself was gorgeous, with frequent stops for scenic photos and, just as importantly, bathroom breaks. Upon arrival, we boarded a two-hour cruise through the fjord. (Yes, fjord—not sound. Despite its name, Milford Sound is technically a fjord: a deep, narrow valley carved by glaciers and flooded by the sea, flanked by

steep cliffs. A “sound,” by contrast, is typically wider and shallower. Early 19th-century Welsh sealer

John Grono, who named it after his hometown of Milford Haven, was more interested in nostalgia than geological accuracy. Later, Captain John Lort Stokes renamed it “Milford Sound,” cementing its naming inaccuracy.)





We cruised all the way out to the Tasman Sea and back, gliding beneath towering cliffs and waterfalls. At one point, we got so close to a waterfall that the spray drenched the boat, giving us what they call a “glacial facial,” allegedly capable of making you look ten years younger. I think I already looked ten *days* younger by the end of the cruise. We’ll see what tomorrow brings.

Rather than driving the four hours back to Queenstown, we opted for a 45-minute scenic flight in an eight-passenger plane. I sat in the copilot seat, having to take control of the plane only a few times.

Thursday, February 5, 2026 - Queenstown

We started the day with a leisurely walk along the lakefront through Queenstown Gardens before boarding the vintage steamship TSS Earnslaw, built in 1912, for a cruise across Lake Wakatipu to Walter Peak Station. Since a trip to New Zealand wouldn’t be complete without a sheep-shearing demonstration, we watched a sheep get a haircut and then a display of a dog herding sheep and doing what they do best: taking jobs away from people. First dogs, then robots.

On the return

trip, we sailed past The Remarkables mountain range, so named because it runs almost perfectly north-to-south, a rare occurrence for mountain ranges.

We fly home tomorrow, which means today? Or yesterday? Since we cross the international date line, we get two days in one tomorrow. We absolutely loved New Zealand and now understand why everyone raves about it. It’s a stunning



country that was the last place on earth to be inhabited by humans, and its five million residents are outnumbered five-to-one by sheep. That may explain why Kiwis can sometimes seem a little ‘sheepish’ around foreigners. Sorry, I had to get that in somewhere and I’m running out of time.

With the U.S. dollar strong against the New Zealand dollar, everything felt relatively inexpensive. Honestly, it would be a fantastic place to live if they drove on the right side of the road.

Thanks for following our trip.  
Love, Lori and Stephen

