

## DAY 16 – Akaroa, New Zealand



This morning we anchored in Akaroa (pronounced Ack-kah-row-ah). No port - we anchored in the bay. This small town is located in a long natural harbor protected on all sides from the Pacific Ocean. The bay itself is located on a Peninsula called Banks Peninsula – and yes, we are still on the South Island of NZ.

We were supposed to go to Christchurch today, but because of the recent earthquake they had there, the port was too damaged for a cruise ship to dock so they changed our itinerary to this small town about 60 miles south.



The town has an interesting history, although discovered by Capt. Cook in 1770, he had moved on and the next visitor was a French Whaling ship.

They got very excited about the natural harbor and bought the land from the local Maoris. They rushed back to France to collect investors and settlers and returned a few months later with every intention of annexing the entire South Island for France. They were even accompanied by a French warship and a representative of the French King who would be governor.

However, once again the British beat them to it, as when they arrived the English flag was already flying as the Brits had negotiated a treaty with the Maoris that covered both islands and New Zealand officially became part of the United Kingdom.

Although disappointed, the French felt they had come all this way and had already purchased the peninsula, so they decided to stay anyway under the rule of the British, thus the only French community in new Zealand was born



and the French ancestry of this little town can still be seen in the architecture and the names of the businesses.

Here is a picture of the ships tender – the boat they used to shuttle us to the town dock.

These are actually the ship's life boats and are an interesting trip in themselves. They hold 120 people and

have twin diesel engines.



Our goal today was to swim with dolphins. This is the only place in the world where you can swim with the New Zealand Hector's Dolphin - a unique animal that is on the same endangered list as the Panda, and only found near South Island New Zealand.

These dolphins are very different to what we are used to in Florida. They are tiny, fully grown only 2 ½ - 3 feet long. They have black rounded

dorsal fins and silver white bodies.

The water here is somewhere between damn cold and freakin' freezing, so they provided us with 5mm wetsuits and off we went in their 14 seater boat to hunt down these little critters.

They actually allow you to swim with them – you may not touch them, but because they are very playful they will come up to you and swim around just a couple feet away.

Well, we still don't know if this is true or not because we never got in the water! Our captain was unable to find a pod of dolphins that would stay with us long enough to swim with.



So we patrolled around for over 2 hours but each group of dolphins we found either had babies (humans are not allowed to play with dolphins that have a baby in the pod) or the buggers chose just to swim by and then away. So we saw a couple here and there but nothing we could get close to.

This was the absolute best picture we could get – note the strange rounded black dorsal fin.

We were very disappointed, but the charter company did offer a partial refund, so we got \$80 back to buy booze with! Apparently they get to swim with them 85% of the time, we just happened to be the crappy 15% today. A pity. Overall a great experience and we enjoyed ourselves nonetheless.



After that we walked around town and had a meat pie, chips and our first New Zealand beer at a very local pub away from the tourists. Prices are better in NZ: 2 beers, a pie and bowl of chips (fries) cost us \$US18.

In Sydney, we paid that just for 2 beers! We also took the opportunity to visit a local "bottle store" (liquor store) and bought a bottle of rum to smuggle on board in a water bottle as we are running a little low on contraband booze in our cabin.

Mission accomplished, that x-ray machine cannot tell the difference between water and white rum!

So although disappointing, it was still a nice day and an exciting boat ride.



They took us offshore out of the protected bay for a little while - there were 6 foot seas and it was an exhilarating ride.

The weather was absolutely perfect. About 75 degrees and clear skies. But New Zealand weather is very difficult to predict because of how cold the Ocean is.

If it is sunny and no wind you sweat your arse off and it feels like 90 degrees, but if one cloud blocks that sun and the wind picks up the temperature plummets to a feels like in the 50s in just a couple seconds!



They still have phone booths here – I was expecting Superman to appear at any time!

Some other interesting facts, we are so far south that the sun sets after 10.30 PM and comes up well before 6pm.

Up until 500 years ago New Zealand was completely uninhabited – the Maoris only arrived 500 years ago from Polynesia.

Several million years ago NZ, Australia and Antarctica were one land mass. When they separated there were NO land mammals on either North or South island in New Zealand.



Me camping it up at a sculpture of an artist.



A captain driving the shuttle boat back to the cruise ship.

So therefore, every single land mammal on either island was introduced by Europeans. Prior to this there were just birds and fish.

Thus there are no animals currently in NZ that can hurt you, like lions, jaguars, bears, etc. Nothing, just rabbits, sheep, horses and mice.

Because there were no natural predators on land, many birds became flightless (like the emu) choosing to walk instead of fly and it was only when the Maoris arrived and started to eat them that 35 species of flightless birds became extinct.

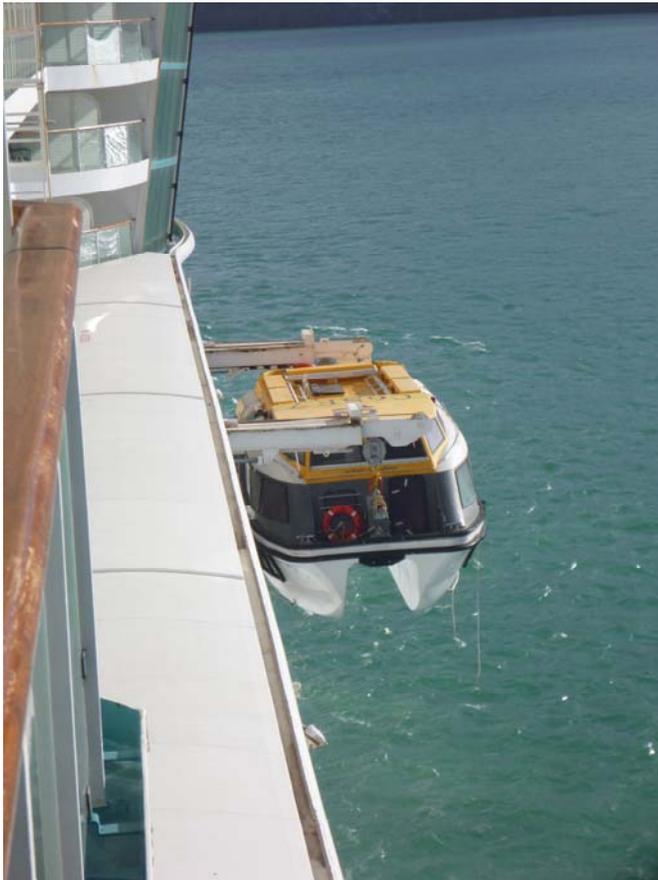


Our ship at anchor



*Note the light house behind the moored boats*

*<<This picture shows the life boats being hoisted back on board.*



Entertainment on the ship has been good the last couple nights, but still very "Australian Basic", as I like to call it. Last night was an illusionist that was excellent, but all tricks were just him and a helper, no big music, lights, smoke or mirrors.

This evening was a great impressionist who also sang some big crooning songs from the 50s, but once again without that expected American style dancing girls and big stage production, lights and effects. It was just him and the orchestra. But still, nevertheless, very entertaining.

Tomorrow we make our first landing on North Island – Wellington to be exact.