



Newcomers Network Trip 2015

7 December 2015, Multicultural Tauranga

By Janet Smith

Ideal weather condition for our 100% outdoor itinerary: cloudy with sunny spells. We boycotted the new Tauranga Eastern Link toll road in favour of the Old Te Puke Highway. "I really should have got you guys to pick me up at home on the way through!" I muttered under my breath.

Okere Falls, and Tutea Falls and Cave: a perfect photo opportunity presented itself when two brightly coloured kayakers sailed over the falls into the Kaituna River in front of us.

Then we pulled up at the Redwoods Information Centre, hunting the parking space. Why had all those people turned out to meet us?

Morning tea was next on the cards. Mark, Ewa and I headed straight for the coffee cart as we hadn't packed a thermos flask. An enjoyable but noisy shared snack ensued. Guilt at devouring all the yummy food swiftly kicked in, and we set off on a 30-minute (yeah, right!) walk – or stroll and chat for some – through the Redwoods with lots of stops for group photo shoots. And last, a mad dash for the "interesting and artistic" toilets.

Blue Lake, Green Lake and Lake Tarawera

A consultation between the designated drivers, Brennan and Lance with the minibuses, and Yuko in the early-leavers car, concluded this was the perfect opportunity to deviate from the scheduled itinerary and head off to the nearby Blue (Tikitapu) and Green (Rotokakahi) Lakes, to be followed by lunch at Lake Tarawera.

First stop: the beach at the Blue Lake where a large group of Maori children were swimming in the clear water. Sadly, we had all forgotten to pack our "togs", so we weren't able to join them. Oh well, another day...

A few spots of rain persuaded us all back in the vehicles, and we drove the short distance to the viewing point where you can view both the Blue and Green Lake from a great vantage point.

The Green Lake is owned by a local iwi and is sacred (tapu), so no-one is allowed in, on or to touch this water. All water activities have to be conducted in or on Lake Tikitapu.

After a short briefing by our resident “tour guide”, Mark, we realised that all the fresh air and walking had made us hungry again, so we swiftly hit the road again and headed for the landing at Lake Tarawera with a passing glance at the entrance to the Buried Village and a promise to stop at an elevated viewing point of the lake on our way back.

The perfect picnic spot by the water

We descended on the car park and started to unpack a plethora of bags, boxes and equipment. After abandoning our initial plan to have lunch on the beach, we headed off, well laden with our lunch goodies, for another one-kilometre walk past the Maori Cave Drawings to the “perfect” picnic spot by the water.

A leisurely potluck lunch was enjoyed by all. We were joined midway through by a handful of ducks, moorhens and a hungry seagull, who all tried to persuade us to share our bounty with them. The ladies were more susceptible to the sad stares of these cute creatures.

Time for “the girls” to leave to collect their kids

A swift glance at our watches reminded us that we had taken much longer on our previous activities than we had planned. Sadly, it was now time for our car-full of lovely mums to leave us and return to Tauranga to collect their offspring.

A quick speech to thank our drivers and trip organisers was followed by fond farewells as we waved goodbye to “the girls”.

As promised, a quick stop to look out at Mt Tarawera from the roadside vantage point provided yet another photo opportunity for some of the group.

Minibus One had already driven ahead and reached the pre-arranged meeting point at the Government Gardens in Rotorua well ahead of Bus Two, and those passengers had used that time well to explore the beautiful Rose Gardens, literally taking the opportunity “to take the time and smell the roses”.

Getting our hands on hand cream

After admiring the beautiful Tudor style architecture from the outside, we headed into the foyer of the main building to see it in more glory. A short stop at the guest shop gave ample opportunity to sample the wares. The manuka honey hand cream was a great success, and the size of the tester quickly diminished.

A short stroll to the nearby Blue Baths gave us another chance to admire the grandeur of a bygone age as we ogled the baths and the old tearooms upstairs. Margareth and I were very disappointed to discover that we weren’t going to be able to get a real “cuppa” there.

No visit to that part of Rotorua is complete without the obligatory look and sniff at the Rachel Spring – a quick reminder that there was nothing wrong with our sinuses, thank you very much.

A stroll over to the Band Rotunda provided yet another “aah” moment for the ladies present. A group of adult pukekos feeding tiny chicks was much photographed by the more sentimental members of the group.

Ohinemutu village and – a locked – church

Back at the minibuses, a quick brainstorming about what to do next meant that we hurriedly headed off in the direction of the lakefront and then onto Ohinemutu village and church. Sadly, when we arrived the church door was shut. It later turned out the church opens from 10:00am to 3:00pm, and we arrived well past 4:00pm – no wonder we were locked out.

We used the opportunity to explore the village and war memorial, and all felt the solemnity of the occasion.

The almost obligatory gift shop was on hand to provide yet more sampling of handcreams and other merchandise. Colin and Kristina winning “hands down” for the softest hands to hand! Yet again Margareth and I faced disappointment as there was no tea shop to satisfy our growing thirst (which wasn’t caused by too much talking, I can assure you).

All agreed it that was definitely time for an afternoon tea stop, well past that time to be honest, so it was back to the buses and off we head for nearby Kuirau Park. There we offloaded the remaining – and some previously hidden new – goodies onto an empty picnic table. A very jovial and sweet laden time was had by all. We were briefly joined by a couple of British holidaymakers who were exploring the area and accepted our invitation to help us finish up the leftovers.

Splitting up in The Walkers and The Talkers

At this stage the group divided into two definite sections – The Walkers and The Talkers. The Walkers, deciding that they really hadn’t had enough exercise for the day, set out to explore the thermal activity in Kuirau Park. The more sedentary Talkers waved them off as we settled down to seriously exercise our jaws. Silence was just descending on the group as the active members started to return – now split into two smaller groups: the serious walkers and the slower “walk ‘n’ talkers” who apparently had more stops for photos along the way. Just waiting to see the evidence of that claim!

We got back into the minibuses to visit one last item on the itinerary – a visit to Hamurana Springs – on the way home. The weather was perfect for the 20-minute stroll to the springs. The sun shining through the majestic Redwoods and native bush and sparkling on the meandering river was very calming and uplifting.

Several groups of foreign travellers were making the most of the lengthy summer days and tramped along the forest pathways behind us, their happy chatter almost drowning out our own noisy banter. Mark, who still had enough voice left, managed to practice his “father tongue” with two young German tourists who very kindly agreed to take a group photo on our cameras.

Glistening rainbow trout in the shallow sandy river

Several of the group had not visited this area before and were very interested in the facts and figures displayed in front of the bubbling spring. As we headed back to the buses the fishermen amongst us marvelled at the number of glistening rainbow trout spawning in the shallow sandy river. There was certainly less “oohing” and “aahing” over these cold-blooded, slippery creatures by the ladies present!

Back aboard for the final leg of the journey home, we had only travelled 100 metres when someone spotted the nearby toilets and an emergency pit stop was made to facilitate a more pleasant trip home for those cursed with weaker bladders. Then finally we were underway once more and headed off in the direction of the gorge road that would bring us back to Tauranga and home – a few hours later than planned. Frantic phone calls and texts ensued as the group realised the need to warn loved ones they would be late home for dinner that night.

Thank you to the drivers

We finally reached our last destination, Tauranga, and quickly set about refuelling the minibuses ready for their return to the depot, eventually arriving safely back at our drop-off point in the Historic Village at 8:00pm. A big thank you goes to our three drivers for their sterling efforts.

Everyone said that they thoroughly enjoyed the day. The highlights: the good company, the sharing of food together, the visiting of new places. “I think we saw all there was to see for free in Rotorua” said one participant.

The only way I can think to describe our outing is: epic and enjoyable. Thanks to everyone who took part.

So what about next year’s trip? Well, the suggestions are already rolling in. Watch this space!