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WHY NEW ZEALAND?

The last 20+ years have allowed us to be part of assisting clients in the planning of over 100 itineraries for New Zealand travel. The range of itineraries have varied from the hard-core fishing types to couples with some fishing mixed with touring to family trips with very limited fishing.

As a result of all our client exposure to New Zealand travel, plus our annual personal trips since 2000, we have enough history to write a book on “WHY NEW ZEALAND?.” This newsletter is devoted to answering the “WHY,” as well as the options available in planning a New Zealand itinerary. Rather than answering the “WHY” myself, I have opted to use the comments from past NZ travelers for that purpose. The challenge in taking this approach was that I had to leave so many comments out due to space limitations.....sorry about that.



The photo above right (from Mike McGuire) captures an exciting NZ stalk. Mike inserted the arrow to point out the large brown finning next to the rock.

DEFINING A “MAGICAL DAY” IN NEW ZEALAND



John Part made the trek to NZ twice annually for over 20 years and has gained some notoriety by releasing 82 brown trout over ten pounds in that time (photo at left). He favors the “off season” months of October and April and, in those months, deals with more unsettled weather than in the summer months. John begins our defining the “MAGIC DAY” with this comment: “Book a good number of days. You’ll lose a third of them with bad weather etc. Most of the rest will be grinding out a result, but with luck you’ll also have a day or two of magic.”

Most clients, who have eight or more days of guided fly fishing scheduled, experience a day or two of that NZ MAGIC...and the NZ version of that magic is often a true fantasy trout fishing memory.

Doug Monnig on his most magical day of his 14 trips to NZ.... "My most productive day was on a beautiful backcountry river where we spotted 45 or more good trout, stuck around 25, and landed 21 between 3.75 lb. and 9 lb." At right, Doug with 10.25# brown taken on a dry fly.



Doug's commentary on the over-emphasis of trophy trout: "8 pound+ trophies are still a real possibility during a normal South Island season, but they are, and should be, the happy exception, not the expected norm. It is tempting to focus only on trophy rivers, but by doing so, I would have missed out on some amazing fly fishing. The most incredible fly fishing I have ever experienced were days spent stalking 3 to 6 pound trout on beautiful, lesser known, South Island rivers that rarely see a trophy trout."



Josh Luft-Glidden, at left releasing a fish, on his second NZ trip: "I think it's safe to say that this was the trip of a lifetime! Across 12 days of fishing, I landed a total of 154 fish, almost all taken stalking and sight fishing. There were some smaller fish taken from riffles, but the average fish was in the 3 to 3.5 pound range and around 20 inches.....I'm also really glad that I was able to get those three days at the

eco-tour lodge in between.....the rainforest was absolutely amazing



The late Bernie Alper, at right....."This will be my 12th year of travel to New Zealand. My first 5 years I was accompanied by my wife. We toured for approximately 50% of the time mixing farm stays and fishing lodges with hotels and eco-tour type lodges. The cordiality of its citizens, the natural beauty of the countryside, the mountains and the rivers and the free-flowing streams, so crystal pure and clean, where you can gaze into the water and target trout like you see in no other place in the world. That is what makes New Zealand a great destination and one that keeps drawing me back."

COUPLES TRIP – TOURING, RELAXING, ROMANCE..... AND FISHING



New Zealand may be the finest destination on the globe to combine world class trout fishing and a couples trip. In recent years, a very popular approach to planning NZ is to have the fly fisherman arrive 8 – 12 days prior to his spouse (assuming the spouse is not a passionate fly fisher). Following the satisfying of his fishing passion, the wife joins for some serious relaxing and touring.

Terry and Gary Butts (at left) always mixed touring and relaxing together with fishing on their NZ trips. This is Gary's report on one of their magical NZ days (note: in a rush to get dressed, they mistakenly switched their boots). "Terry hooked and landed a 8.5# brown on her 3 wt rod. My notes indicated we landed 11 fish, most were over 6#. About half were on dries. Terry's 8 1/2 lb was taken on a dry. We had a wonderful day, but due to a problem with our wrong boots, both of us had terrible leg cramps at the end of the day."

Gary's comments after their first of four trips: "My wife and I returned from our first trip to New Zealand in March. I can't get the trip out of my mind. I keep wondering if there is any other place on the planet where you can stalk and sight cast to 6+ pound trout - trout that rise to huge dry flies. Any other place where the fishing is supported by great accommodations and good food - all enhanced by a friendly, English speaking populace. It will probably haunt me until we return to New Zealand."

Credit Tim Quattlebaum for being our first client to introduce the word “romance” into his recap of his first NZ trip with wife Shirley. Tim arrived early and fished for 12 days in three different locations before Shirley joined him in Fiordland. From Tim: “Shirley and I had never been to New Zealand. The trip Don put together for us was a perfect match of fishing with GREAT GUIDES who introduced me to a vast array of NZ fisheries and techniques, plus a couple of weeks of relaxation and romance. The fishing was physically and mentally demanding, and wonderful!”..... From Shirley: “Our time spent exploring NZ was the best of both worlds. It was an escape that allowed us to disappear into nature and an opportunity to experience some of the best hospitality the world has offered us so far.” Shirley and Tim are returning for their second trip in 2025 and tagging on, following NZ, a stop at a Fiji out-island, “second honeymoon” type spot.....Romance indeed!!!!



Angie and Greg Graves (at right) spent two and a half weeks on the South Island, almost circling the island touring and fishing. Angie’s comments on the main non-fishing aspects for her: “Non-fishing highlight for me was the Wilderness Lodge.....everything we did here was special.....the perfect hosts.....The Fiordland Lodge was breathtaking.....The meals were amazing as well as the host and staff. Enjoyed our daytrip out to Milford Sound. Our guide was entertaining..... The farm stay was special.....She is a wonderful cook.....We had an amazing time.” (Angie’s



“non-fishing full report” is interesting, but too lengthy for this newsletter – if you’d like a copy, just ask)

Greg on his fishing highlights: “It was truly an epic trip for me.....took my personal best brown trout about three times.....We fished big braided rivers, a couple of spring creeks on days with a lot of wind.Hit another creek and fished the Willow Grubbs under the trees.....Landed 8 or 9, four-plus pounds.....on a slow morning we decided to make the jet boat happen and it worked out great. Loved that Angie could go and experience that.....the largest fish of the trip was just at 7 lbs (above, left) and it was a spectacular eat.”



From Dan Hartman.....”My wife and I spent 26 wonderful days in New Zealand and I fished 9 of them (Dan, at left, was able to net two double digit browns). Fishing was just part of our trip and we toured the South Island starting in Abel Tasman National Park in the north...to Fiordland in the South.We really enjoyed our trip to New Zealand - the fishing was fantastic, the scenery unforgettable, and the people as friendly as anywhere we've been! Included were two outstanding family owned eco-lodges in different areas – coastal and alps.”

Darla and Bill Schmunk.....three weeks touring and mixed in four guided fishing days in two different locations. “This was an epic day. Felt like I was truly in the backcountry of New Zealand...river drainage with multiple braided streams and beautiful snow-capped mountains all around me. It felt like we were the only people on the planet and had it all to ourselves. And we did. Fishing crystal clear water and catching trophy trout just made this an epic experience that will last a lifetime.....magical and a dream come true.” Comment on a farm stay in a rural setting: “It was amazing. Our hosts were so fun. The lady of the house even took us on a ride around the area. Food was over the top.” Photos below.



THE FAMILY NZ EXPERIENCE

Family experiences require exploring more options to account for everyone’s interests.



The Beard family, as a whole, are high adventure seekers. Photo from left to right: Catherine (16), Mom and Dad, Josh (21), and Nate (23). Father Ben and Nate were passionate fly fishers who fished with some of the top guides in all of NZ. They reported releasing an average of six fish a day averaging four pounds. Ben summed up the trip with this thought: “If we could do it over, we wouldn’t change a thing. Not sure that all 5 of us would agree on that, but it would really be difficult to improve on it.”

Their itinerary was for three-plus weeks and included a stop in Australia on the way home. Some of their NZ outdoor adventures included bungee jumping, parasailing, a heli-hike on one of the famous glaciers, rock climbing, staying in eco-tour lodges, and hiking some of the famous treks in Fiordland. In the photos below, that’s Nate on the left with a nice brown and casting to a sighted fish in a Fiordland river while his guide watches carefully.



The Chris and Rob Winkel family consists of son Trent, his wife Sarah, and daughters Megan and Jaclyn. Their NZ adventure was focused entirely on 11 days in the spectacular southwest part of the South Island. This area includes Fiordland National Park and Queenstown with the South Island Alps as the dominating geographical feature. Chris described the trip as “A trip of a life time. What great memories!”



The family pictured in the shot at left is: (l to r) – Mom Chris, Megan, Jaclyn, Trent, Sarah, and Dad Rob.

Chris describes their overall experience: “.....the itinerary was absolutely perfect. The hotels and lodges were excellent. We especially loved the lodges in Fiordland and the one near Queenstown. Two beautiful locations with incredible accommodations. The staff at both were so friendly, the food excellent.....everything was perfect. Trent and Rob had a wonderful experience fishing. They very much enjoyed it.....and had a blast. The Fiordland tour company excursion was great.....including the hike on the Milford Trek and a cruise on Milford

Sound. I would definitely do more excursions with them. Highly recommended. I have never seen a more beautiful place.....we will definitely go back.”

Tim Shanley (at right) arrived in NZ about a week before his family of six and scratched his fishing itch with eight days on the water in two different locations. He really “hit it right” his first three days and sent this message: “..... really enjoy fishing with Scotty... good days according to him – 48 fish to net so far... mostly in the 3 to 8 pound range.”



There were three generations of the Shanley family in New Zealand. Mother and Father, Cindy and Tim; kids Timothy (10) and Reagan (11); and Grandparents Connie and Renato. After his eight fishing days, the entire family met together in Christchurch. Together, they spent an additional two weeks visiting some of NZ’s finest eco tour lodges, one of our favorite lodges located in Fiordland, and some time in Queenstown.

GUIDE DRIVEN FISHERY – WHY THAT’S A PROBLEM??



Many of the best trout fishing guides on the globe are Kiwi’s. These are absolutely the finest! If you want to begin working on your PHD in fly fishing, these are the professors you want! They know the best waters to fish during the variable conditions. They have intense knowledge of trout, their diet and habitat, and their behavior. They have eyes for spotting fish that will amaze you. And, they have access to the best waters in their respective areas.

So, what’s the problem? The top guides fill their calendars very early. Many of their regular clients, who return every year, keep their same timeframe from year to year making it tough for newcomers to get time with them. Since the Covid closure in NZ, we’ve done many itineraries for first time visitors as much as two years in advance to attempt to get the ideal itinerary. A lot of dates need to fit together in exactly the right sequence to achieve a logistically comfortable trip.

WHEN IS THE “BEST TIME?”

Generally, it is accepted that mid-January til late March produces the most settled weather in NZ. However, in our 20+ trips to NZ, we’ve experienced both good and lousy conditions in every month. There are very few things about NZ weather that are “settled.” It can change dramatically and very quickly, even during the course of a single day. For example, a few years ago, during the middle of the summer, they had flooding conditions severe enough to close the international airport for a few days.

Those that prefer the early and late season do so for these reasons, even though odds are greater they may encounter more “iffy” weather :

- Less people – sometimes it seems like everyone is trying to get into NZ during their summer.
- More availability with the best guides and the top lodges.
- Rested fish



“WHEN I TIRE OF NZ.....”

At the beginning of this newsletter, John Part introduced the thought of the magical NZ experience. Maybe the best way to conclude is to hear of one of John’s magical days, actually two days: “.....but over these two magical days, my guide of more than 20 years, treated me to one brown over 11 pounds, and two more trout nudging just over ten pounds each, one of them a rainbow. Four more (two 9 pounders, and two 8 pounders) were over the ‘trophy’ threshold of 8 pounds. The few others, 7 and 6 pound fish which would have been champions in many lower altitude rivers, and indeed in most other countries, still greatly appreciated, but slipped back to grow bigger. All of them wild fish, descended from the ova and fingerlings planted by early European settlers. ‘Such stuff as dreams are made of’.



So that’s it really. Just a few grip and grin photos on my iPad to remind me that it really happened, as I fly back towards home in London. Worth it? Never in doubt. So, I asked the expert, ‘what do I do when I tire of New Zealand?’ ‘Ah, that’s the problem’, he replied quietly; ‘there’s nowhere better.’ ”

TIE-INS: FIJI AND AUSTRALIA

If you have the time and the budget.....you’ve already taken the travel time and spent the air fare to be in the South Pacific - Fiji and Australia are geographically easy to add-on during your way home. Fiji presents an excellent opportunity for a tropical second honeymoon type experience. We prefer a more isolated out-island experience and we’ve done a Fiji tie-in over a half dozen times (right).



On our last seven NZ trips, we tied in the marine paradise of the Ningaloo Reef in the far northwest corner of Australia. This is a



great saltwater flats fishery and it still is far less pressured than many of the well-known saltwater destinations. We have several trip reports available on this fishery. Also, this is a protected World Heritage Site and, depending on your timing, other marine attractions include:

- Scuba diving and snorkeling (all year)
- Sea Turtles – nesting, laying, and hatching
- Whale Sharks
- Humpback Whales and their pups

Photo, above left: Shiz Nakawatase with a Golden Trevally. World record Golden’s have been taken at the Ningaloo.

THE INITIAL QUESTIONS IN PLANNING A NZ ADVENTURE

To begin the process of planning, we have our “10 STEPS IN PRELIMINARY PLANNING FOR NZ” available – if you have any interest, just ask for a copy. These steps include the initial questions that need to be answered before serious planning can start.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,

Don Muelrath

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