



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Who Farted?!?

by Amaru & Suzanne, January 12th 2007

Yup, that's the first question you might ask yourselves when you arrive in Rotorua, also known to some as "Fartopolis" and "Rottenrua"

It has been given these lovely nicknames due to its rich scent of rotting egg-like odour which is sulphide gas, produced by the thermal activity....they also say that the smell is at its strongest when it's cold and rainy and the clouds are low.... We picked the right weekend to visit then, didn't we! But hey, the smell is just part of the fun here in Rotorua, that and loads of other things.

Suz and I finally got to get out of Auckland, we rented a car and hit the roads with big expectations for this trip. It didn't start off all that well, the rain was pouring and we couldn't see that much on our drive. We were fearing that the rain might restrict us from doing what we wanted.

The drive to Rotorua took us around three hours and we could definitely tell when we had arrived, just by the smell. Both Suz and I lowered our windows and took a deep sniff....and then a second later our windows were back up. But it was fun!

We had no problem finding our accommodation, checking in and leaving our luggage, we stayed at a hostel in the very centre of town, but we made sure we had an ensuite room for ourselves....we're just not dorm people anymore =))



Danger - Thermal Area
Heaps of these signs around



**That really, really
STINKS!!**

It was now time for us to start exploring the town and what it had to offer, and we just decided to follow our noses towards the very intense smell of sulphur. It took us down to Lake Rotorua where we had our first views of the steam coming off the lake, seeing that in combination with the rain was awesome....

While we were standing there looking out over the lake, Suz noticed something a bit closer, just a meter away from us there was a small opening in the ground with a lot of bubbling going on. We got quite excited over this, our first sign of proof of thermal activity. I crawled a bit closer to get a photo and maybe even a short movie clip, at that exact moment when I was leaning down towards the opening the wind changed and came toward me. And I was given a huge wave of sulphuric smell.....

It nearly knocked me over, it was that strong. I quickly took the photo I wanted and walked to the other side of the opening to be able to get some fresh air. A few metres away we encountered a path and followed it for a bit. Here we saw our first signs warning us not to stray from the path. Even though the ground might look solid it's only a few centimetres thick at some points and the water is boiling under it.

While we were walking alongside a big hole the wind changed once more and a big whoof of air came over both of us. We had no choice this time, we couldn't walk around the hole since we were following a path and the smell really got to us, we almost started getting gagging feelings, it was that bad!

We felt that we had had enough of Lake Rotorua so we got back into our car and drove off in search of something else to see.



Suz
with Lake Rotorua in the background



We're not just making this up
Trust us, it stinks really bad!

That something else turned out to be Kuirau Park, a park filled with many hot springs with plenty of gas and steam coming from every direction. At least the smell wasn't bad here, we were just surrounded by steam. Which was very eerie and beautiful at the same time.

We crossed a small bridge in the park that took us over part of the small lake there. Just by holding our hands down close to the water we could feel the heat rise up from it.

It was beautiful to stand on the bridge and just look as the winds came and went, they dispersed the steam during different waves and during these waves we were given a few seconds when we could make out the rest of the lake - in between the times when my glasses were fogged up. A second later it was gone once more.

After spending quite a while just strolling around the park, looking at all the different springs and bubbling pools, we made our way back to the town centre where we had a nice Indian meal and then ended our night at an Irish pub where we had a drink or two and watched the cricket where Australia beat England.

While we were sitting there a group of young people came walking through the doors and both Suz and I suspected that these youngsters must be Americans. It looked like walking into a pub was something they were not used to. And yes....they were.

It was actually quite entertaining to hear them watching the cricket and trying to make sense of it. One of them knew some basic rules and was trying to explain it to the rest. But after about 5min they dispersed to other areas of the bar....I guess it was all too confusing for them!



Kuirau Park
Filled with thermal activity



Walking into the mist
Looks magical doesn't it?

park.

The next morning we got up early, got breakfast to go and jumped into the car. We drove for about 30km south to an area called; Waiotapu Thermal Wonderland, a thermal area which is very compact and easy to stroll around in.

But first we were to see the Geyser, the Lady Knox Geyser. This Geyser goes off every morning at 10.15am (with a little help from one of the park employees who throws soap into the geyser every day to make it erupt) and can reach heights of 20m. The amount of rain that the area has received determines how long the geyser erupts for, our guide told us that this one might go one for an hour and a half or so....

Well, we had our look at it (during the rain as you can tell from our pretty rain ponchos) and then made our way through the rest of the

The park was great, it took us about 90min to walk the whole area and our favorite spot was the "Champagne Pool", a small lake in the park in which you can see the bubbles in the water...hence its name. We also loved all the different shades of green the park provided us with, the trees, water, plants and even some rocks contained green.

Our last stop at the park was the bubbling Mud Pool, this is a pool of mud in which you see a few small eruptions here and there. We touched some of the mud and it was one of the finest and softest muds we've touched. Now we were really looking forward to our mud treatment the next day.

Now that we'd explored the park and its thermal activities it was time for us to discover our first experience of some genuine Kiwi madness (which this country has lots of), Zorbing!!



It's not just fog though...
It's hot air...



Almost like being
in a steambath.....hot!

Zorbing is a very simple, yet genius concept. It works like this, you have a hill and a huge ball. You put the person in the ball, add some water and then roll the ball down the hill... It's great!!

There are different ways of doing the rolling but Suz and I decided to do one together. We got a change of clothes, a ride to the top of the hill, jumped into the ball and then had to stand up to push the ball down the hill. After that we fell over and were going all over the place inside the ball. At no point could we control what we were doing....hilarious!!

The only minus you could add to the experience is that it's over way too soon... that, and I lost a contact lens when I jumped into the ball!

We dried up, got changed and then went back to our room where we had a bit of a rest before the rest of our evening.

We were now ready to experience a Maori Cultural night, there are quite a few different Maori shows in Rotorua, we chose one called "Mitai Maori Village". We were picked up by bus and then taken to the spot where the festivities took place.

Here we were given instructions on what the evening had in store for us, first we started off by having a look at our dinner for the evening, a "Hangi", a traditional Maori way of preparing the food which is cooked underground on hot rocks. Tonight we would be feasting on Chicken, Lamb, Potatoes and Kumara (sweet potatoes), it looked yummy, but it wasn't time to eat yet.



Maori design
At Te Puia



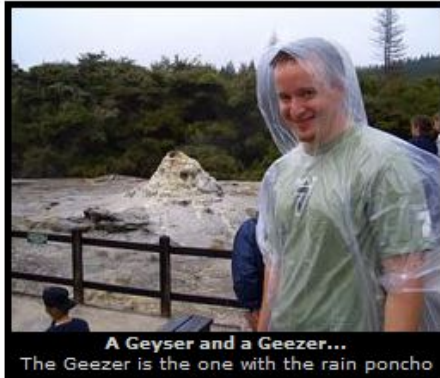
Some more Maori design
This time on Hinemoa street

We were now taken down to the stream where we watched the Maori warriors arrive in the war canoe, we then followed them and got to see a show, starting off with a welcome ritual. This involves a warrior coming up to one of the visitors with hostile gestures and noises, he then lays down a fern leaf for the visitor to pick up. If it's picked up it means that the visitor comes in peace.

Besides the greeting ceremony we were given a short education about Maori culture and life. A few traditional songs were sung and at the end it was all finished off by the traditional "Haka", the war dance (anyone who has seen the NZ rugby team, the All Blacks, knows what I'm talking about). The show was now over and it was time to go back to the dining room where all the food had been served and we were told to dig in!

It was almost as chaotic as school lunches used to be when I was a kid, everyone just went straight to the food tables and started filling up their plates. Most of us were standing in line waiting nicely for our turn but there was one elderly woman who just pushed her way through and grabbed whatever she could grab....for some reason the word "German" popped up in my head. And a few seconds later I could hear her speak to her husband....yup!

Ah well....I got my food eventually and walked back to the table where Suz was already sitting waiting for me, she asked me why I went to the middle table and not the one in the corner....Anyway, the food was worth the wait. It all had a very distinct smoky flavour due to the way it was cooked, delicious!



Once we finished our lovely dinner we looked over at the table and there was lots of dessert, so we felt that we had to help ourselves to some lovely chocolate roll.

After the food we were all divided into small groups and were given a tour of the area by night, we were shown some glow worms in the area which was quite a treat (we have a trip planned later on to see the glow worms in Waitomo), and also a bit unexpected.

The night finished up by our guide giving us a bit of history on Maori way of life and then we were driven back home to our room.

On our last day we left for Hells Gate, this is another thermal wonderland, but with the slight difference that it's also a spa.

We first took the walk around the area, which was very beautiful as well, but since we had seen most of this the day before and also due to the fact that we couldn't wait to jump into the mud, the walk was a quick one!

The Mud bath was great, we were given a small bath to sit down in and told that 20min was the longest we could sit in there. Then we started putting mud all over ourselves, it was a very nice smooth mud, like the one we experienced the day before.

Once our time here was done we jumped into the sulphic pools where we sat and just relaxed. The temp in the pools was around 40C so it was nice and hot, and since it's thermal it heats you up from the inside. We had to make a few cold shower stops here and there to cool us off a bit



Eventually we decided to call it a day and made our way out of the spa, into the shower and then back to our car.

On the way back home to Auckland we took a different route, got to see a giant Kiwi fruit, made our way to Mount Maunganui (which was packed with people and so cloudy that we couldn't see anything, so we just left and continued on our way), we also got to experience an awesome view over a valley close to Matamata, the place they now call "Hobbiton" after the "Lord of the Ring" movies. We didn't do the tour since it's waaaaay too expensive, and we've heard that anyone except "Die-hard" fans of the movies will be disappointed.

Before we reached home we also managed to drive past Paeroa and have a look at their cheesy giant bottle of L&P, the local drink in NZ.

We arrived back home to our apartment later that night, both of us tired but very satisfied over what we had seen and done during this weekend.

Rotorua is an awesome area to visit, there is so much to see and so many things to keep you busy during your stay, there are still things we want to see and experience in the area, but we'll have to do that at a later time.



Quite powerful, even though it needs a "helping hand" to get started



Waiotapu Thermal Wonderland
All in all a walk of around 90min



Not sure what would happen if someone would throw a stone in....



Make sure you stay on the designated pathway!



It's a beautiful landscape ...and so different!



Lake Ngakoro Waterfall
A nice waterfall



So many shades of green everywhere
Trees, plants, water...



The "Champagne Pool"
The highlight of the area!



Feel like jumping in?
I'll pass...



Another bubbling pool
This time of mud



Lot's of small
mud explosions here and there!



The Zorbonauts!
Time for some crazy Kiwi madness!



So, we're supposed to roll
from up there to down here....



Ahhh....that's how you do it
And it's heaps of fun!!



Mitai Maori Village
Time for a Maori evening



Uncovering the "Hangi"
A Maori way of cooking food in the ground



Looks yummi!!
Chicken, Lamb, Kumara and Potatoes



The War Canoe
The arrival of the Maori warriors!



The ritual ceremony of encounter
To determine if the visitor is friend or foe



Maori Chief
Explaining some of the Maori culture



Tikitere...
Also known as "Hells Gate"



Suz
in the cooking pot!



I'm being a little devil
...I'm still nice though!



That's where we'll end up soon
Let's just explore this area first



Make sure you don't litter
...you don't want to enter these pools



A hot thermal waterfall
The largest in the southern hemisphere



All these danger signs all over the place
Maybe lots of people go wandering



That water is bubbling
I'd reckon it's pretty hot!



Our mud bath
We're relaxing with some mud treatment



And then soaking away
in the sulphur pool!



A giant Kiwi fruit
We just had to stop and buy some



Not too bad is it?
A beautiful view over the valley



Welcome to Hobbiton
Well....the area where the movie took place



A giant Lemon and Paeroa bottle
...and a small one in my hand

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