

Letter of 11/03/2015 from newlyweds Lawrence & Jessica DiRienzo

Re: STILL NEW TO THE ZEALAND

Family and friends,

Since our last email... still averaging 50-60 degrees Fahrenheit (or should I say 10-16 degrees Celsius, it just sounds so much colder when you put it that way) but can definitely tell summer is on its way!

Per our last update we hadn't gotten behind the wheel yet. We'll leave it as it was a bit of an adjustment but we both are becoming more confident with driving on the left side of the road, while sitting on the right side of the car.

To accommodate the tiny roads and parking spaces, we bought a Mini Cooper! For all of those not on Facebook please see the link below to see the more than ecstatic picture of me jumping with joy! Proud moment. I have wanted one.

[Meet Charlie](#)

We plan on sticking with one car while living in central Auckland as public transportation is very accessible and user friendly from there during the week.

As for our weekend trips...

Weekend of September 26th – 27th we spent in the Coromandel Peninsula (about 3 hours Southeast of Auckland). Saturday we drove into the Coromandel Peninsula next to the Old Kopu Bridge that was a single-lane swing bridge completed in 1928. Due to a gradual increase in the traffic between Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula, by the early 1990s the bridge became the most heavily used single lane bridge in the country with traffic volumes of an average of 9,000 vehicles per day. Traffic flow over the bridge was controlled by traffic lights and the bridge was notorious for queues (lines) that formed during peak times such as holiday weekends, etc. In December 2011 a new two-lane bridge opened directly to the south of the old bridge, which has been retained for our viewing pleasure

[\(Old\) Kopu Bridge](#)

We then began our hike onto the Pinnacles Track taking us up to the serviced 80 bunk Pinnacles Hut followed by a faster paced walk to the top of the Pinnacles to catch the sunset. We then walked back to the Hut to enjoy dinner while conversing with three fathers that included us in about three hours of playing cards and good laughs with them and their kiddos.

[Pinnacles Track to Hut & Pinnacles Sunset](#)

Sunday we made the trek down from the Hut and continued onto Te Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve.

Some fun facts about Cathedral Cove:

- The Māori name Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve is part of the area first claimed by Hei, a tohunga (priest) on Te Arawa waka at the time of the Polynesian migration to New Zealand, circe 1350 AD. Hei settled his people on the area around Mercury Bay, asserting ownership by referring to Motueka Island as 'Te Kuraetanga-o-taku-Ihu' ('The outward curve of my nose'). It is said he made this claim near the present day site of Hahei. Hei's descendants, as tangata whenua, still retain a strong ancestral and spiritual attachment to the site, and continue their role as guardians, or kaitiaki, of the resources within it.
- Cathedral Cove became a marine reserve in 1992 and is New Zealand's sixth marine reserve, the first for the Coromandel. With no recreational or commercial fishing allowed inside the reserve, marine plants and animals are free to return to their natural balance.

For our movie and music gurus...

- The cave and beach were used as the tunnel through which the Pevensie children first re-enter Narnia in the movie version of The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian.

More recently the cove was used as one of the locations in the music video for the song "Can't Hold Us" by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis featuring Ray Dalton.

After a nice 2 hour leisurely walk to the Cathedral Cove we got back in the car to drive to Hot Water Beach where you can find people digging their own spa pool in the sand and relaxing in the natural springs. This is a truly unique Kiwi experience but much to our surprise, thinking what a great way to end the weekend you must go within 2 hours either side of low tide. We had just missed our mark. We will be going back.

[Te Whanganui-A-Hei \(Cathedral Cove\) Marine Reserve](#)

Saturday, October 3rd Larry and I went to our first ITM Cup Rugby game, Auckland vs. Northland with a final score of 64 -21. The ITM Cup competition is similar to AAA baseball or AHL/EHL hockey back in the states in that it's professional players, but plays second fiddle to the national team (All Blacks). It involves the top 14 provincial unions of New Zealand. The game was played at Eden Park which has a capacity of 50,000 fans, but there was maybe 5,000 in attendance. The All Blacks next match after conclusion of the world cup is scheduled for 11 June 2016 against Wales at the same stadium. You can expect every seat to be filled for that test!

Sunday, October 4th we ventured out to Piha Beach (about 45 mins West of Auckland), one of the most popular beaches in the area and a major day-trip destination for Aucklanders throughout the year. It is a popular surfing location with both national and international competitions held there in the past, but also is known for rip currents being very unpredictable and drownings are not uncommon.

[Piha Beach](#)

Saturday, October 10th we headed to Waipoua Kauri Forest (about 3 hours Northwest of Auckland). Here we visited one of the two notable largest living kauri trees, Tane Mahuta and Te Matua Ngahere. Most of the North Island was canvassed in Kauri before settlement, but heaving logging in the 19th century has left only small pockets of the giants remaining.

[Tane Mahuta, Waipoua Kauri Forest](#)

Saturday, October 17th Larry participated in Sports day with KPMG playing ultimate frisbee, soccer, netball and rugby against all the other KPMG offices on the North Island. Although we didn't get any pictures of the sports being played we did get a great picture during after match drinks called, Boat Race. Each side is a "boat" and the fastest team to drink their beer wins, however, you cannot start drinking your beer until the person ahead of you has finished theirs.

[KPMG Sports Day](#)

Sunday October 18th – We explored some of Auckland's wildwest coast by hiking along to Te Henga Walkway to O'Neill's Bay.

[O'Neil's Bay via Te Hanga Walkway](#)

October 24th-26th was our Labour Day Weekend here in New Zealand. Larry was also able to take Friday off so we headed North for a 4 day weekend! Friday we drove up to Rawhiti Northland to start the 17.5km (just under 11 miles) Cape Brett Track to the Cape Brett Hut. With a unplanned but necessary car maintenance pit stop we decided on last minute, we didn't start the hike until 4pm arriving at the Hut just after 11pm. For anyone visiting us that has interest in this hike we look forward to doing it again during the daylight in order to capture the spectacular coastal scenery alongside the cliff-face track. Chris Duffield you are already signed up!

Once we arrived at the Hut we met Zofia who was from Auckland. We all sat up eating stovetop ramen and enjoying a glass of wine before heading to bed. Zofia left around sunrise while Larry and I slept in, enjoyed

breakfast and a couple rounds of cards while waiting for our water taxi to pick us up. Yes, our scheduled water taxi! Even though the boat ride back from Cape Brett was an experience of hanging on for dear life due to the storm coming in, this trip definitely set some new hiking standards.

[Cape Brett Track to Cape Brett Hut](#)

We continued our journey onwards to Paihia (about 3 hours Northeast of Auckland, 1 hour West of Cape Brett) to board our overnight cruise of the Bay of Islands! This overnight cruise consisted of paintball target shooting competition with 'Lee' the plastic duck, dusk fishing, buffet dinner with everyone on board and night kayaking where you usually would be able to participate in a guided star gazing session but unfortunately it rained the entire night.

Sunday morning we arose to a traditional kiwi breakfast (hot porridge (a.k.a. oatmeal) and fruit) followed by snorkeling and kayaking. On the homeward cruise, we were able to enjoy raw sea urchins!

[Bay of Islands Overnight Cruise](#)

Saturday October 31st, we enjoyed a relaxing day around the house with an afternoon BBQ at our friends Kristina and Andre's house. There we mingled and made friends with individuals from all around the world ranging from Ireland, Singapore, Whales, Germany etc. Upon arriving home Saturday evening Larry went full klutz and knocked our tv over trying to roll it over to the bedroom for a movie night followed by the 5am Rugby World Cup game which we were no longer watching in bed.

Sunday November 1st, we arose at 4:45am and eagerly went downstairs to the hotel lobby with a few dozen other fans to help support the All Blacks vs Australia in the Rugby World Cup 2015 final with a final score 34-17. The game was played in London hence game time. It was 3am for Australia. It was a great game! Today (or our yesterday, depending on when you read this ;)) we participated in the ticker-tape parade held at Victoria Park (10 min walk) to give the All Blacks a well deserved welcome home.

[Here Come The Men In Black](#)

We look forward to exploring more of the North Island over the next month. Our first trip to the South Island will be in December. Stay tuned.

Larry is getting on well at work and enjoying the cosmopolitan mix of co-workers hailing from Singapore, Fiji, India, Pakistan, Canada, UK and Ireland. Clients worked/working on so far include manufacturing, IT, fishery, and automotive which is a far cry from telecom back in Denver. I am still looking for a job but becoming a great cook. Should have a few interviews over the next couple weeks. Fingers crossed.

Cheers,
Jess & Larry