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Scott Isom and I departed Seattle and Portland, respectively, en route to a rendezvous in San Francisco, and a 14 hour flight from there to Auckland, New Zealand, with a continuing 3 1/2 hour flight on to Sydney. There we were scheduled to pick up a rental car and drive west for a couple of hours into the UNESCO World Heritage listed Blue Mountains.



Jamison Creek in the Blue Mountains

Except we kept hitting road bumps. Both flights from Seattle and Portland were delayed due to bad weather in San Francisco. My flight left 3 1/2 hours late. Computers were misbehaving at the gate, so it took a long time to board. Once aboard, already 3 hours late, we were told that San Francisco was still not ready to receive planes and that we could get off the plane to help ourselves from the snack/drink cart parked in the jetway since it would probably be at least 45 minutes more. I've never seen 200 people going back and forth up a one person aisle simultaneously, hands full of packages of chips and cookies and bottles of water. It was entertaining.



Sandstone Layers Add Character to this Waterfall

After the crowd settled down, I decided to have a go at the cart but just as I had reached it, I heard a voice on the gate agent's radio advising the gate agent to get the plane loaded and buckled in and into the air quickly. Apparently, they were concerned about San Francisco changing their minds.

Fortunately, I had a 5 hour layover in San Francisco, so still arrived with at least an hour to spare. Scott had preceded me and after a quick snack and chat, we headed for the Air New Zealand gate. Boarding went smoothly, but again we sat on the plane going nowhere, this time for about 1 1/2 hours. Our layover in Auckland was only 1 1/4 hours. Apparently a couple of passengers didn't have the visa clearance required by Australia, so they had to retrieve their luggage which had already been loaded. Then there was an obscure maintenance problem that took another hour.



Scott Enjoying the Delights of Weeping Rock

Finally we were airborne; however, the new scheduled arrival time in Auckland coincided within a couple of minutes of the scheduled flight departure time of our flight to Sydney. But it was a good flight. I thanked God for the ample legroom and an empty seat next to me! I slept better than I remember sleeping on a plane for a long time. After dinner was served, and before I slept, the purser announced that he was aware of all the misconnects passengers on this plane now had due to the late departure from San Francisco. He said he would come around and talk to each passenger about their options - unheard of!

But he did! He wrote on a slip of paper the new flight details of the flight he had put them on and gave each passenger (there were well over 100) that slip of paper, having already changed the booking for them. I've never seen that much effort to deal with flight misconnects.



Reflective Pool Along Jamison Creek

Arriving in Auckland, we'd been flying for about 18 hours, plus delays, and headed for the gate of the newly scheduled flight to Sydney. We were issued new boarding passes by the gate agent and waited to board. When we handed our boarding passes to the attendant, however, they were refused by the scanner and we had to "stand over there" while a gate agent tried to figure out why. Computer linkage with Australia was the culprit - they couldn't verify that we had the necessary electronic visa required to enter Australia. Fortunately, our agent, Debbi, had provided us the hard copy of this visa and by showing that, we were able to board.

Middle seats on an airplane are not my favorite, but that's what Scott and I both had. Since we were not scheduled to fly on this flight, we had to take what was left.



Weeping Rock

After 3 hours, we started our descent into the Sydney area, and as I gazed out the window at the sunny morning sky, I pondered that, in spite of the little hiccups in our journey, we had transited the largest ocean on the planet in one flight in only slightly more time than it would have taken an ancient mariner to develop a 5 o'clock shadow. Amazing!

And when we landed, we found our luggage had followed us as we switched flights in Auckland.



Yours Truly at Wentworth Falls

Next stop - the rental car counter where I was told that they could NOT honor my reservation. I was on a watchlist! I had rented from this company on a Spain planning trip last year. During that trip, my car had been slightly vandalized - a headlight had been broken and a small section of the hood next to it damaged. The credit card company I paid for the rental with had handled the insurance and the claim. Over the months following, they sent several emails to me notifying me that the rental car company had failed to send them the appropriate documentation to pay the claim for damages. Finally, they closed the claim.

So now I was on a watchlist. Fortunately, Scott had brought his driver license and they agreed to honor the reservation for Scott. After loading luggage into our car (with 65,000 miles it was the most tired rental car I think I've ridden in) Scott took to the wheel, on the wrong side of the car, and we navigated, on the wrong side of the road, out towards the Blue Mountains.



Jamison Valley

Our mission...to find a doable walk in this amazing system of canyons called the Blue Mountains. I've spent as much time in this area in years past as any place with the possible exception of Hawaii, looking for trails that were not too difficult for our groups. The setting is primeval and splendid, but the terrain can be forbidding.

Included here are photos I took, mainly along the Charles Darwin Trail. This famous scientist visited Australia on his 5 year voyage aboard the HMS Beagle, the same trip on which he drew his even more famous conclusions in the Galapagos Islands.



Scott Calls this a "Corn Cob" Bush

I think we have a winner! But it is pretty short, only a couple of miles. We are headed down for breakfast in a few minutes, then out to scout more options for hiking in the Blue Mountains. We meet the group in Auckland next week. I'm excited about the changes to this new edition of Walking New Zealand & Australia, and look forward to sharing these revisions with a new group!



Hanging Swamps on the Undercliff Trail

After 25+ hours on 3 planes, several hours of layover in airports, a couple hours of driving, and 4 miles of hiking the beautiful Blue Mountains, a shower never felt so good!

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