

travel  
tales *the adventures of*  
**George & Pat Stewart**

By Resident Writer **Rachel Meystedt**

This month, George and Pat Stewart are sharing highlights from their trip to New Zealand, where they spent three weeks, and Australia, where they spent two weeks. They were joined by their son, Ian, for the end of the trip in New Zealand and on to Australia. The Stewarts both work at the College of Veterinary Medicine at MU—George is a professor and department chair and Pat is a veterinarian. They have lived in Thornbrook for twelve-and-a-half years.

They decided to visit because George had always wanted to go to Australia, and as a huge Lord of the Rings fan, Pat has wanted to visit New Zealand for quite some time.

Pat made all of the arrangements herself online. The first part of their trip was a 17-day private tour of the South Island, New Zealand with the tour company, Tailored Travel. They only hold tours with a maximum of 4 people, and it's designed around the travelers' interests, not a preset agenda. For the rest of their time on vacation, Pat knew what activities the group wanted to do so she used TripAdvisor to find the companies with the best reviews. Also, for the first time, they used AirBNB and Home Away to book their accommodations in Australia. They were a little nervous about that, but all of their accommodations were wonderful.

During the New Zealand part of the trip, the Stewarts started in Christchurch which included visiting the botanical gardens and going on a cruise near Akaroa to see dolphins and fur seals. They also visited Willowbank Wildlife Reserve where they saw their first kiwi bird and also participated in a Maori traditional ceremony.

From Christchurch, they traveled to Hanmer Springs, stopping at a number of wineries along the way. They highly recommend New Zealand Pinot Noir! On the way to Nelson, they stopped at the Pelorus River Bridge which would look familiar to any fans of the Hobbit. It was on this river that the hobbits travel down a river in barrels while being attacked by the Uruk-hai. The ultimate highlight in Nelson was visiting the jeweler (Jens Hansen) who made "the ring" for Lord of the Rings! Pat got to hold a huge version of the ring that was actually used in the filming, and she bought her own ring, complete with elvish writing. The Stewarts spent two days at Franz Josef, hiking up to see both Franz Josef glacier and Fox glacier, which are literally right next to rainforest! They say the scenery was amazing. From Franz Josef, they traveled to Wanaka for a two-day stay. Wanaka is surrounded by two very large glacier lakes with water so clear it is hard to believe. While in Wanaka, the Stewarts took a jet boat ride and saw some more Lord of the Rings filming locations, including the scenes where Aragorn was riding up to Helm's Deep. One of Pat's favorite parts of the trip was an amazing overnight cruise on Doubtful Sound. They cruised

on the sound during the day, anchored in one of the fiords overnight, and then experienced the most incredible sunrise on the water. During the last part of the private tour, the Stewarts stopped in Queenstown and took a helicopter ride, which, of course, had a Lord of the Rings theme. The hour-long flight included landing on the top of a hill overlooking the sites for Isengard and Fangorn Forest followed by a landing on a glacier.

From Queenstown, the Stewarts flew to Auckland where their son, Ian, joined them where they went to the top of the Sky Tower, climbed to the top of an inactive volcano, toured rainforests and beaches, and then enjoyed a private tour of Hobbiton, the actual movie set for the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit movies! They got to see Hobbit holes that are not on the public tour and then were given their very own second breakfast at the Green Dragon—a truly amazing experience!

From Auckland, the Stewarts flew to Adelaide, South Australia. During their first full day, they went scuba diving to see the leafy seadragon, found only off the coast of South Australia. The dive was a success and they saw multiple seadragons! They then took a trip to Kangaroo Island—the scenery was gorgeous but the animals were even better! They saw kangaroos, koalas, wallabies, sea lions, fur seals, echidnas, penguins and many types of birds. The following day, they had the opportunity to swim with wild dolphins and ended up seeing 70-80 at one time!

From Adelaide, they flew to Cairns for 3 days of scuba diving the Great Barrier Reef. They didn't see any great white sharks, though, but did see some reef sharks.

Their last stop was in Sydney where they visited the Opera House, walked across the Harbour Bridge, went to Taronga Zoo, Manly Beach, the Rocks and the Blue Mountains.

Some advice the Stewarts would give neighbors planning a trip to New Zealand is to use the Tailored Travel tour company. Driving in New Zealand is not easy and it can be dangerous. Having an experienced driver who knows all of the best places to go is definitely worth it. If going to Australia, their advice would be to realize that Australia is as big as the continental US, so pick just 2 or 3 places and schedule your visit to each so that you don't backtrack. The people in both countries are very friendly and helpful, and the Stewarts always felt safe, even in large cities such as Sydney and Auckland.



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