

New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji

TSC Fall Expedition

Sept 27 – Oct 20, 2023

After three years of delays due to COVID, the Clear Lake Area Ski Club and the Texas Ski Council finally started our grand adventure on Sept 27, 2023. The long pre-trip extension was to Cairns, Australia for 12 CLASC members. Our first day we spent riding a local train that climbed up thru the hills and to the Karaganda Rainforest. While there we enjoyed a duck boat tour and a visit to the local wildlife park. Many members took the opportunity to get a photo while hugging a koala. The next day we all went to the Great Barrier Reef where we had a great time snorkeling, sightseeing in a glass bottom boat, and watching fish feeding in an underwater observatory. Our last day in Cairns was a free day and members explored the local aquarium, museums, and the local boardwalk.



The shorter pre-trip extension was to Sydney, Australia. The 12 CLASC members from Cairns were eventually joined by another 8 members. Unfortunately those 8 people were delayed by one day when their flight leaving the US was cancelled. While in Sydney some of us enjoyed a half day tour of the city seeing famous sights such as the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour bridge. That night many members bought tickets to see the musical Miss Saigon at the famous opera house, and they really enjoyed the show. It was quite impressive seeing a helicopter land on the stage. The following day many members took a full day tour of the Blue Mt region where we visited a wildlife park, took a gondola and funicular ride, and hiked on a elevated boardwalk through a local rainforest.



On Oct 5 the 20 members flew to Auckland, New Zealand where they were joined by 4 more members. The following day the entire group took a ferry out to Waiheke island where we spent the day doing olive oil tastings, wine tastings, and beer tastings. We also had a fantastic lunch at a local winery where some people said it was the best salmon and beef tenderloin they ever ate.



Next it was time to discover our inner hobbit. We bused down to Hobbiton where we toured the outdoor movie sets used to make the Lord of the Rings movie trilogy. We enjoyed a meal fit for a hobbit, walked through the Shire and enjoyed a drink at the Green Dragon Inn.



The area of Rotorua was next on the itinerary. While there a couple people endured a cold and windy evening to do a night kayak tour of glow worm caves. During the day several people toured the local hot springs, geysers, and national park. It was like a mini version of Yellowstone. One night the entire group went to a local Maori village where we enjoyed a traditional pit cooked dinner followed by a cultural ceremony and show featuring the haka and several tribal dances.



After 4 days on the north island, we then flew down to Queenstown on the south island where we spent the next 4 days. That night we enjoyed a delicious multi course club dinner at a local restaurant. Most of the club chose to take a day trip to Milford Sound where they drove thru a beautiful forest and then took a boat trip around the big fjord of that area. The TSC held two events during our time in Queenstown. First was a buffet dinner at the top of the Skyline gondola with a view of the whole city. The other was a cruise on the local steamship TSS Earnslaw to a local farm where we ate a great meal and watched a sheepdog display its skills. That was followed by another ride on the steamship while being entertained by a piano player and a sing along of folk songs.



The last two days in New Zealand were free days to explore on our own. Our members explored the town, bought lots of souvenirs, and enjoyed the amazing lake view. Several members drove to the nearby wine region for a couple days of wine tastings.



After an amazing time in New Zealand, the main trip came to an end. Four of our members returned home while the remaining 20 people flew to Fiji for a few days on the beach for a post-trip extension. We had ocean front rooms with gorgeous views of the water. During those days some people enjoyed the resort amenities while others took the time for more adventures. People went whale watching, sunset cruising, or visit the local marina. Some members took a full day/night trip where they first visited a local tribal village, then rode a small boat out to a small island where they spent the day snorkeling and kayaking. That evening there was a dinner cooked in a traditional underground pit followed by a great cultural show featuring knife dances, fire dances, and the Fijian version of hula. The evening ended with a night boat ride back through a mangrove region. After one final day on the beach, it was finally time for our grand adventure to come to an end and a return to reality.





Overall, the three week trip was an amazing adventure. We had a great time learning the culture, seeing the sights, eating the local food, and interacting with the locals. It was definitely a bucket list trip.

BULA !

Keith Zimmerman
Trip leader

