

# TRAVEL

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jumping from the bridge. We got there before the opening hour and one of our group feigned (?) great dismay at not being able to have a go!

Next stop was the Wine Education Centre at Cromwell, described as the “fruit growing and red wine capital of the South Island.” Although our experience at the center was well conceived, it was still morning which may have abridged tasting appetites of some in our group. We were led into a large room with counters, behind which we sat. Before each of us were six small samples of pinot noir. We then watched a film of each of the vineyards represented, with the vintners discussing terroir and the distinct qualities of their pinot. After each segment we got to taste a sample of the wine described. I commented to Brigitte that this approach might work in Sonoma or Napa Counties’ wine centers, even with a tasting fee. Some of us then went on to buy bottles of one or more of the pinot noirs at the retail shop in the facility.

We drove along the west coast, along the Tasman Sea until we reached our destination – the Franz Josef Glacier Hotel. The next morning we set out for the glacier. The Franz Josef Glacier is 12 km long and located in the Westland National Park. It was named after Franz Joseph I of Austria by the German explorer Julius von Haast in 1865. The glacier descends from the Southern Alps to less than 300 meters above sea level. It is only a short bus-ride from the hotel.

The glacier is one of main attractions of the west coast, drawing around 250,000 visitors a year. There is a fairly easy one-to-two hour walk along the side of the glacier with tours led by experienced

guides. At least, my wife described it as “fairly easy” -- but I had decided to take the opportunity for a solitary walk on the trails through the dense forest, looking for photo opportunities – nature and birds (of course). It was along one of these trails that I took Figure 5, showing the glacier in the background.

## SHEEP

After several more days of various activities we headed east through the high, mountainous Arthur’s Pass National Park on our way to our final destination, the city of Christchurch. Bad weather had finally set in for a day or so but when we got to Flock Hill Sheep Station the sky had cleared. This is a 36,000-acre high country sheep farm. It had mostly Merino sheep, but also a few deer and cattle.

There were 38 million sheep in New Zealand in 2009, considerably less than in 1970 when there were 70 million, but that is still an average of almost ten per capita! There are four sheep breeds raised – the Romney, Drysdale, Perendale and Merino. The Merino trace their origins to North Africa and are famous for producing the ultimate fiber for the production of fine apparel. We were taught how to distinguish the various types of wool, from coarse to very fine, measured by microns. We also watched dogs herding a small flock of sheep (Figure 6). Besides wool, New Zealand exports a lot of lamb, of course – more than 21 million were processed in 2009. After a nice lunch (yes, there was lamb available) we boarded our buses for the long drive to Christchurch.

## CHRISTCHURCH

Christchurch is the largest city on the South Island at 350,000 and considered “the most English city outside

England.” It has many Victorian and Edwardian buildings and a large Gothic-style cathedral at the city’s heart. There is even an Avon River threading its way throughout the city with flat-bottomed boats called “punts” being piloted by young men for the tourists.

The church is certainly worth a visit, especially for an evening chorale. Also, I recommend the renowned Arts Center and \$43 million Art Gallery opposite. While staying in the city, we were taken on a dolphin-spotting cruise in Akaroa Harbour, various other activities and provided a farewell dinner the night before we flew back to San Francisco via L.A.

In September, months after our return, there was a 7.1 earthquake that struck Christchurch, resulting in billions of dollars in property damage. Luckily, casualties were light, however.

My wife and I have traveled abroad widely – from Chile to Croatia, but view our New Zealand trip as one of our favorites. Everyone should visit the country at least once!

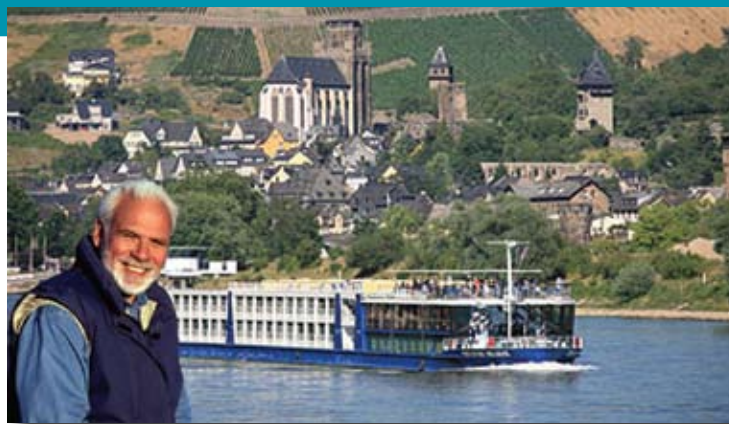


Figure 5. Franz Josef Glacier



Figure 6. Sheep, Flock Hill Sheep Station

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