

New Zealand 2: Of oddities and beauty

Arriving in New Zealand, a place that is almost the antipode of my patria, I couldn't help recalling few quotes of my favorite intellectual icons:

1. "YOMAM LEILAM VE-LEILAM YOMAM, IGULAM MERUBA VE-AGOL RIBU' AM" (Their day is their night and their night is their day, their circle is square and circular is their square) [Chaim Nachman Bialik, our so-called national poet, in his fantastic tale "Champion of Onion-ship and Champion of Garlic-ship", describing the amazing findings of the first prince who arrived at the Terra Incognita of the onion-less and garlic-less island.]
2. "South of the Equator, people wear hats on their feet, and hamburgers eat people." [Lisa reveals the scientific facts about the southern hemisphere to her brother Bart in one of the all-times best episodes of The Simpsons.]
3. "They say 'goodbye' when they come and 'hello' when they leave." [Jerry Seinfeld digs from his memory some of the intricacies of the imaginary place called 'Bizzaro World', after Elaine tells him that she met a threesome that is the exact opposite of him, George and Cramer.]
4. "One lunatic??! I see scores of lunatics!!" [David Levy, a former Israeli minister of foreign affairs and a constant subject of jokes that refer to his alleged stupidity and ignorance, in response to his wife that called his mobile to warn him that a news report spoke of a lunatic that was driving against traffic on AYALON freeway.]

Indeed, their night is our day and their day is our night, their winter is our summer and their summer is our winter (but it has more raindrop than our winter), their left is our right and vice versa (at first it felt as though all of them are lunatics who drive funny cars on the wrong side of the road), they embraced the stupid British idea of two faucets in the sink, but the hot (boiling!) water is on the right while the cold (freezing!) water is on the left in order to make it more challenging, and they speak so funny (lets see if you can guess what "tiin", "dick" or "she'er" mean [ten, deck, shower respectively]). In addition, they are nice, polite and calm; indeed, Bizzaro World.

Apart from the above trivialities, there's nothing much to say about the Kiwis. The main attraction here is the natural beauty of this amazing country. Writing about that beauty is like telling a good Jewish joke in Hebrew; it never sounds as good as in Yiddish. I fear that my poor language and limited photographic skills cannot do justice to such overwhelming beauty (but this time, BTW, I intend to compile a Web-album when I return to Israel). So let me take an unusual approach in trying to convey to you a feeling of how fucking beautiful is that NZ. Its beauty simply pisses me off, OK? For example, Jaffa and I keep using a sentence due to our old friend Ron Yachini: "SHE'YISSAREF LAHEM HATACHAT" (may their ass burn). Namely, how can God be so unjust by dropping this concentrated capsule of beauty in one place and leaving us with MAPAL HATANUR? (my non-Israeli friends, don't even ask.) Or, when driving towards a trail-start near Wanaka, we admired the amazing alpine snow-covered mountains, with the green meadows and well-groomed sheep, when suddenly, an amazing lake with pristine blue water and white wavelets popped in, as though God simply dragged-and-dropped that lake into the picture. At that point I uttered with a genuine frustration "NU

BE'EMET" (oh, give me a break). Or, on our way to Queenstown, we had our lower jaw separated from the upper one for at least 20 minutes, viewing the live postcard in front of us (lake, snowy mountains, amazing trees....) until, at some point, we observed another "item" that made us both go "Wow". I shouted to Jaffa "Stop the car! Stop the car!!" and she did, but before she had the chance to bring the vehicle to a full stop, I already pulled the hand brake so hard (and impatiently), that even I was surprised at what just happened. And why won't I be impatient? Can't we drive from point A to point B without having to stop every few minutes?

So, what have we seen so far?

(1) Mount Cook - the highest mountain in the south pacific, that despite its modest height (I think 3700m), is a very impressive and daunting mountain that is covered by a huge glacier and is usually engulfed by clouds. We managed to see it without clouds for a short time and did a walk to one of the lower glaciers in the area.

(2) Wanaka - a beautiful town on the shores of an even more beautiful lake, with much more beautiful surrounding mountains, that are reflected in the most beautiful way in the lake. The area around Wanaka offers superb walks.

(3) Queenstown - the Mecca of extreme sport. The Kiwis, being so trouble-free and bored, have invented numerous forms of extreme sport, such as bungy, or high-wire (you are tied to a long cord and a rocket that is attached to your ass accelerates you to 3g over a deep canyon). You see, extreme sport is not really a sport, since the only physical requirements are a mild brain damage, and the only thing extreme about it is the price (6 seconds of bungy jumping cost about 100 USD). The principle in extreme sport is to detach you from the land and throw you in some manner through air or water. We took a jet boat tour on the Shotover river. A powerful jet boat takes you to an intoxicating wild ride through a narrow beautiful canyon and the driver tries to drench you in as much water as possible and to scare the shit out of you. Jaffa kept protesting that it is not scary one bit and that even my driving is much scarier. I loved it though and the canyon was really breathtakingly beautiful .

After Queenstown (to which we'll return), we drove to Te Anau, a sleepy town that is the starting point to many treks in the Fiordland, in the southwest of NZ. The trek that we were about to do, the one from which we returned today despite major forces, was the trek of all treks, the mother of all treks, the crown-jewel of treks. The Milford.