

## EnZed Remembered

There just aren't a lot of people in EnZed. There are 500,000 total on the island, with only 100,000 being on the south island.

While the scenery is truly spectacular on bright sunny days, the truth is that the sun doesn't shine everyday on the south island. While the torrential rains can be beautiful in their own right, be sure to bring a waterproof jacket if only to block the wind.

The lack of animals in EnZed is downright creepy. There are birds, and word has it there used to be millions of birds. But then rabbits were introduced. Now rabbits didn't eat birds but they did what rabbits did and soon there were too many rabbits. So the Kiwi's introduced the stoat, a small critter that resembles a corndog with legs. Well in addition to rabbits, the stoat eats birds, more specifically bird eggs, so all of a sudden there was a stoat problem much worse than rabbits. The only native animal found in EnZed is some variant of bat, so all other animals are either penned up (deer and sheep) or shot at/eradicated (stoat, possum, rabbit). You're hiking along and once in a while you'll see a bird, but not much else. But there are flies. Specifically the dreaded sandfly. These buggers can burrow thru concrete and take a particular interest in hikers legs. I thought I had this beaten by brinking along this "Jungle Juice" repellant which is 99% deet. The only problem is that I was the main course for the sandfly's while I unpacked my bag to find the juice. The bite is more like a burn and heaven help you if you pull wool socks over the bites. It's akin to hot coals against your skin. Those lacking the "juice" cure were presented with 2 options. The spray to repel was \$23, the ointment to sooth the burn was \$32. EnZed knows where hit ya.

There is no native food to EnZed. Lots of sweet thai chili, but it's a sauce applied to things. The hangi is a meal prepared in a hole in the ground, so it doesn't really qualify as something you could get for "Take away". I enjoyed major grass-fed beef burgers on both islands here and they will be the food I'll remember, except for the 3 sandflys I inadvertently ate while setting up my ten.

The "Great Walks" are just that. You have to reserve several months in advance, but to think you've got a trail only walked by you and 39 others a day, (Milford Track) I think that's pretty select company. The terrain is quite varied, from open fields ringed by tall mountains, to the steep passes that are as often as not clouded over to the moss-covered rainforests. You'll never seen taller fern trees anywhere.

The south island is also home to adventure travel. With a quick snap of the wrist, the journeyman adventurer can jump off any number of stationary objects, take a header out an open plane door, swing, swoon, paddle, climb, putter, steer, sail and scamper over any number of things here. The caveat is to "swipe first" and question why you're doing it later. It's almost predatory how they young are enticed to swipe here, but the economy depends on it. Rarely do you see locals getting harnessed up for this level of entertainment. It's sort of a "kiwi hello" to travelers. And of course each activity can be video-taped for the folks back home for only one additional swipe of the credit card.

Just like an extended stay in Disneyland, eventually you run out of rides and it's time to hit the road out of town. Several guys on the bus wanted to extend their stay by arranging to work for accommodation;

12hrs of indentured slavery in exchange for a 8-bed dorm room. Theoretically this minimal amount of work would free you up to secure a second paying position, but in practice all it ensures is that the employees are enticed into drinking more at the Altitude, the attached bar adjoining the hostel.

While talking to Simon, an engaging Department of Conservation employee, he mentioned the “life-cycle of the Wanaka Worker”. Everyone lands in Wanaka with big dreams of doing well in the picturesque larger towns in the south. They secure the cheap lodging and perhaps even snag a coveted paying position at a hotel or café. But the reality is that the cost of living in Disneyland is many times greater than the coins paid out to the cartoon characters. In the short term the workers can justify being there since they ARE in-fact living in Disneyland, but eventually even cartoons have to eat or drive a car and the wages leave them in deficit spending. Eventually the lust of living by a wonderful lake is offset by the stench of not making a living wage and you get “over” Wanaka, and leave town. Looking back at the characters in Queenstown, that holds tru; the ones in love put up with lack of pay. Those who are falling out of love are gone.

Food and drink are expensive in the shopping stores, but not as bad as in Australia. Spending a considerable amount of time in these two locations has steeled me to the realities of spending deflation and made me more appreciative of the relatively cheap food prices back home. I remember complaining about paying \$4 for a beer in Alaska. That sounded expensive until you pay \$8-9 in South Pacific.