

Train your way in WA with Kevin Pearce

Explore our historic **GOLDEN OUTBACK** and discover beautiful Esperance on the South Coast **GOLDFIELDS-ESPERANCE RAIL & COACH TOUR - 6 DAYS**



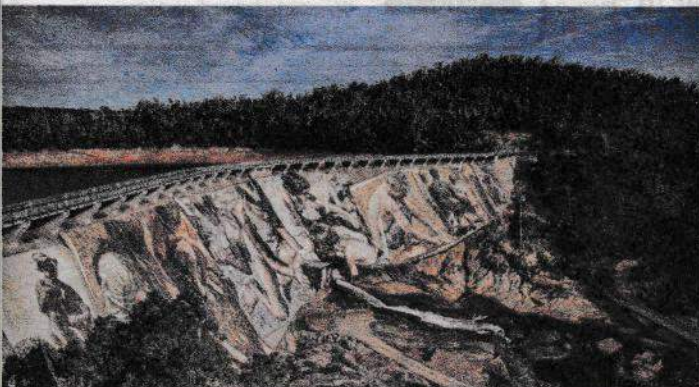
DEPARTS 01 November 2021
TOUR COST from \$1798 Pensioner

INCLUSIONS

- Return travel aboard the Prospector train to Kalgoorlie
- Three nights' accommodation in Kalgoorlie and two nights in Esperance.
- Tour the northern ghost towns including Menzies, Leonora, Gwalia and Kookynie
- Travel to Esperance via Coolgardie and Norseman
- Esperance Bay of Islands cruise including lunch on Woody Island
- All meals and morning teas included
- Meet special guest Jenny Seaton from Curtin Radio



Celebrate Christmas over four wonderful days in our delightful, green **SOUTH WEST** **SOUTH WEST CHRISTMAS RAIL TOUR - 4 DAYS**



DEPARTS 23 December 2021
TOUR COST from \$1668 Pensioner

INCLUSIONS

- Return travel to Bunbury aboard the Australind train
- Three nights' accommodation at the first-class Abbey Beach Resort in Busselton
- Sightseeing tours including a cruise on the Blackwood River inlet in Augusta
- See the giant murals on Wellington Dam
- Enjoy a gourmet Christmas lunch at the award-winning Flutes Restaurant in the Brookland Valley Winery
- Drinks included with Christmas Eve dinner and Christmas Day lunch
- All meals included, one with entertainment



One train, so many views

BY TIM RICHARDS

AMERICAN poet John Whittier said the saddest words in life are "It might have been", and I have them in mind as I walk past the grand facade of Auckland's former main railway station. A beautiful Beaux-Arts building from 1930, it would be the perfect place to begin a long train journey across New Zealand's North Island.

But nowadays it contains apartments, and the Northern Explorer train to Wellington departs from the undistinguished Strand Station behind it. But what really matters is what lies ahead: the prospect of a marvellous array of scenery as it tracks through the North Island's complex geography.

The train itself is a fine thing, with a brightly painted locomotive pulling several carriages with big windows, a cafe car, and an open-sided observation car.

As we start our 681-kilometre journey south, the excellent recorded commentary on the supplied headphones tells me Auckland is built on dormant volcanoes,



A GREEN AND LOVELY VISTA: Beautiful farmland views from the Northern Explorer.
Photo: Tim Richards

and had its own Maori settlements before Europeans arrived. As we leave the suburbs behind, the landscape grows verdant, a series of picturesque undulations wreathed in morning mists.

The land flattens out past Hamilton, with the first hint of mountains on the horizon. I get chatting with a group of Kiwi friends on an outing to Tongariro National Park for a few days, retirees who swear

by the social nature of trains.

We all alight five hours into the journey at National Park Station, from where we're transferred by bus to Chateau Tongariro. This marvellous grand hotel opened

in 1929, and though in need of some refurbishment it's packed with character.

I can't fault the views. As the chateau is situated on the lower slopes of Mount Ruapehu, one of three volcanoes within the park, there are dramatic vistas in every direction. After following a nature walk near the park's visitor centre the next day, I enjoy the hotel's famous high tea with a view of the dramatic cone of Mount Ngauruhoe (Mount Doom in the *Lord of the Rings* movies).

After two nights I pick up the Northern Explorer again, on its final five-hour run down to Wellington. The second stage of the journey is no less dramatic, as the rugged terrain had to be conquered by multiple viaducts.

Advised we're about to pass over three of them in a row, I head to the observation car to take photos without window reflections. They're great shots, snapped in the rush of chilly air as we pass above grey-walled ravines with rivers way below.

The sun starts to set as we reach the coast, and the commentary points out the

bulky profile of Kapiti Island on the Tasman Sea, a nature reserve from which predators have been eradicated.

It's dark as we enter Wellington and snake through the city to arrive at Wellington Station, right on time. At last I'm in a magnificent terminus worthy of such a long journey, a neoclassical beauty opened in 1937 and still the hub of the capital's rail network. Stepping out into the cool evening to walk to my hotel, I feel I have arrived in suitable style.

Tim Richards travelled courtesy of TFE Hotels, KiwiRail, Visit Ruapehu and WellingtonNZ.

IF YOU GO...

The Northern Explorer journey starts from \$85 per person.

Adina Apartment Hotel Auckland Britomart has comfortable accommodation within walking distance of Strand Station: adinahotels.com. DoubleTree by Hilton Wellington is in a stylish heritage building not far from the station: hilton.com
 ■ greatjourneysofnz.co.nz
 ■ chateau.co.nz