

2/11/13 - Day 36 – Picton, New Zealand: The town of Picton is located on the South Island of New Zealand. After leaving Wellington yesterday the Amsterdam sailed west through Cook Strait and then turned south from Cook Strait into Queen Charlotte Sound. When we got up this morning we were sailing along the beautiful fiord-like waterway of Queen Charlotte Sound headed toward Picton.

We were fortunate to be discovered by a pod of dolphins that came alongside the Amsterdam and surfed on our wake. We got a few pictures before they lost interest and drifted away.



The appearance of the dolphins gave our day an exciting start.

About 8am we arrived at Picton, New Zealand. The location of Picton on the South Island of New Zealand is shown on the map on the right.

Picton is a relatively small town nestled between the hills with a nearby port area. Later in the day we were able to get a photo that showed both Picton and the Amsterdam tied up at the dock, as shown below.



New Zealand has an active wine producing industry. We had signed up for a

wine tasting tour organized by Karen Deacon. We met with Karen and the rest of the folks going on the tour about 9am in the Amsterdam casino room. Our tour would consist of about 20 people riding in two vans operated by “Highlight Wine Tours” of Blenheim-Marlborough, New Zealand (www.highlightwinetours.co.nz). We left the Amsterdam and found our tour guides, Colleen and Lorrisa waiting for us with their vans. We boarded the van with Lorrisa and were on our way.



We headed south out of Picton over the mountains to a wide valley in the county of Marlborough. Barbara was excited to see some sheep along the way and had to get a photograph.

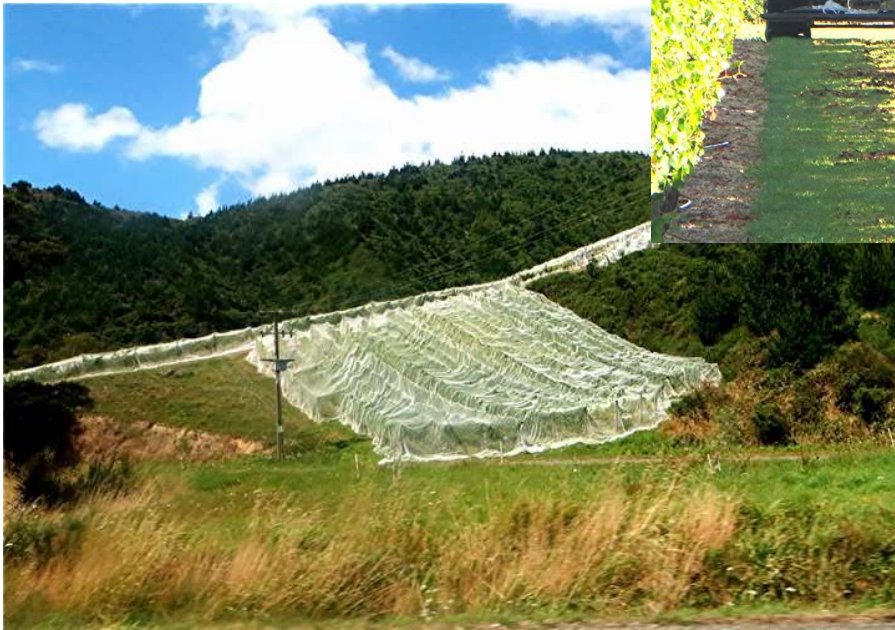


However, we were informed that the sheep raising business is being replaced by increasing competition from the winery vineyards and dairy industry. Cows grazing in pastures were about as numerous as evidence of sheep.

Lorrisa explained that the tour would consist of visits to 5 wineries where we would have an opportunity to sample 4 or 5 of their best wines. Around noon we would visit a winery with restaurant service and we would have lunch. That would be followed by additional wine tasting and finally a visit to a boutique chocolate factory. We would then return to Picton for a brief walk around and then return to the Amsterdam.

The scenery in the valley was gorgeous with mountain peaks in the distance and bucolic farm and vineyard fields spread out on both sides of the road we were on.

At one point we stopped where there was an operation in process to place white netting at the base of the grape vines to keep birds from eating the grapes. Later we saw an example of a vineyard where the plants were entirely covered by the netting, as shown below.



Our first wine tasting stop was at Hunter's Wines.

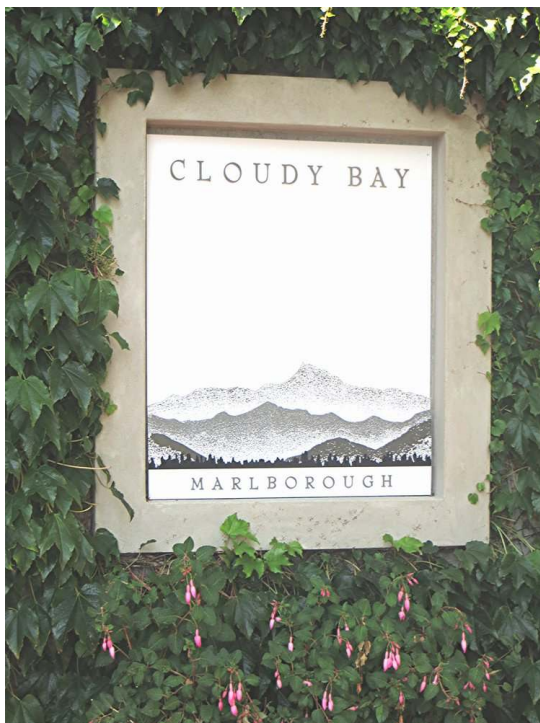




We were ushered in to a tasting room where glasses were ready and everyone enjoyed a sampling of several wines. Afterwards we wandered outside to see the vineyard.

Some varieties of grapes were on trellises high enough to walk under.

Our next stop was at the Cloudy Bay winery.





The presenter at Cloudy Bay told us about the history of their company and awards their wines had received. She particularly emphasized their Sauvignon Blanc that had won several prizes in 2012. She also mentioned that the logo that is on their bottle labels shows a specific mountain peak that is visible from their vineyard.

We tasted and were impressed enough with the Sauvignon Blanc 2012 that we bought a bottle. Then, just for fun, we took the bottle outside and held it up to compare the bottle label image of the mountain with the actual mountain peak. In the picture below, the bottle

label is on the right and the actual mountain peak is in the background near the middle. We thought the resemblance was convincing.



We moved on to the Framingham Winery where we see Jean and Tom beginning their wine tasting adventure.



On the left Fred and Brad appear to be giving a second thought to Karen's enthusiastic opinion on this wine.

The landscaping and general pastoral setting of the wineries made each stop very pleasant. Here are some pictures of our wine tasting team relaxing and enjoying the scene.



Ken Fred June Tom Jean

Eventually we couldn't contain ourselves anymore and whooped with joy for the marvelous day we were having here in New Zealand.

We stopped at the Wairau River Winery and Restaurant where we had a wine tasting and also enjoyed lunch.



After lunch there was a stop at a shopping venue where Barbara found just the right wool yarn she had been hoping to get while in New Zealand. This was our last New Zealand port so she had to act fast.

She happily found support for her shopping binge when she read the sign at the shop door.



Our day in Marlborough wasn't quite finished. Before we left the valley our guides had one more treat for us. They took us to a boutique chocolate factory that was not too far away.



Inside we found all kinds of delectable candies and watched the candy making process.



After this delicious detour we headed back toward Picton. The town of Picton lies on the other side of the mountain range that surrounds the marvelous Marlborough valley that we had toured today.

After a 30 minute ride we arrived in Picton and the vans were parked while we took a brief walk around to get the feel of the place. The view in the picture below is the main street of Picton. Walking around Picton was pleasant but the time was approaching 4pm and we needed to get back to the Amsterdam. We loaded up in the van and returned the mile or so to the ship in the harbor.



After saying goodbye to our guides, Lorissa and Colleen, we headed for the Amsterdam gangway. We remembered a very nice Picton sign we had seen this morning when we left the ship. Not only did it welcome us in English but it had the words “Kia Ora” which is the native Maori greeting to visitors. Barbara quickly whipped out her library card and we snapped this picture on the right.



This had been a wonderful relaxing day of wine tasting and touring the beautiful countryside of New Zealand. Karen Deacon is a Cruise Critic member who organized our tour today and others like this. It has to be a real labor of love since her only reward is our sincere appreciation for what she does.

The good ship Amsterdam got underway and slowly sailed away from Picton about 6pm. We were headed for Sydney, Australia where we expect to land after 3 days at sea.