

Charmaine's Diary

31st May 2010

Monday

With Rose duties in Darwin complete, my travelling buddy Nicola and I have a few free days to explore before the New Zealand Rose selection later in the week. Fly from Darwin to Sydney, Sydney to Christchurch and Christchurch to Queenstown. In doing so, we go from 40 degrees Celsius to 4 degrees Celsius. Fresh off the plane and absolutely freezing we go on a hunt to buy merino woollen socks, scarves and hats. Once sufficiently clothed, we trek through the town to find *Ferberger*, an independent burger joint that apparently is a Queenstown institution. And after one bite, we understand why.

Tuesday

Take off on an early morning bus trip up the mountains which look like odd shaped chocolate truffles sprinkled with icing sugar. Blown away by the scenery. Visit a remote family museum with all sorts of artefacts from bygone life in the mountains and which covers the area's gold mining history. Hurtle along the narrow gorges of Skippers Canyon in a jetboat with lots of thrilling 360 degree spins. Later in the evening take the Skyline Gondola with fantastic views of Queenstown, the lake and mountains. At the top of the gondola we race luges, little three-wheeled carts, down a run. Nicola wins but I console myself that her boyfriend races Formula Vee and she has been receiving tips from him.

Wednesday

Horse-ride in stunning Glenorchy, an area outside Queenstown where Lord of the Rings was partly filmed. Ride across delta flats between the Rees and Dart rivers on our trusty steeds Ginger and Sponge Bob with fabulous views of Misty Mountains. Regarded as the adrenaline capital of the world we decide that horse-riding is a little too tame and we need to get more adventurous in Queenstown. Not so keen on the bungy jumps and canyon swings, we opt for a happy medium in hang gliding. We literally run vertically down the side of a mountain before taking off like a bird learning to fly. Taking in the breathtaking views in such a unique perspective, we understand the motivation of Icarus – thankfully the pale winter sun failed to melt our wings! To end a brilliant day we take in a Live Maori Culture Performance during which we watch the fearsome Haka where the warriors prepare for battle. And believe it or not, it's a lot more fearsome than when the All Blacks do it.

Thursday

Catch the bus from Queenstown to Invercargill, host city of the national final of the 2010 New Zealand Rose search. It is also where Lisa Monaghan, the 2009 New Zealand Rose, hails from. The weekend gets off to a great start at Waxy O'Shea's Irish Pub where the Roses meet their escorts for the weekend. The escorts are put through their paces with competitions for the best

recital of a limerick in an Irish accent, best mover on the dance floor, best pourer of a pint of Guinness and the longest potato peel. Hilarious.

Friday

Meet the Rose entrants and judges for breakfast. Amongst the judges is Maryanne Murphy, the 1988 International Rose of Tralee. As there are only 51 international Roses of Tralee in history who have had the honour of going through this very special year I am very excited to meet her. Nicola and I are taken on a trip to Riverton, a scenic village just outside Invercargill and reminiscent of the West Coast of Ireland. We delight in browsing through the local craft shop and looking at the local paua shell jewellery. Back in Invercargill we pop into Rose Lodge to visit Lisa's grandmother who is recovering from an operation. Elegantly dressed in a beautiful cardigan with a Rose design, she is surprised to see us. Say a quick hello to some of the other residents - they are in the middle of a music session and the piano player starts playing the Rose of Tralee impromptu – and she's not even Irish – brilliant! Attend a reception in the city council chambers hosted by the city's mayor. Later on go to a cocktail party where the girls are interviewed and do their party pieces. Once again I am in awe of the talent, passion and presence of the Rose entrants. The night ends with Lisa performing the lip sync of Tiny Turner which she did as her party piece in Tralee last August.

Saturday

Wake up to a newspaper delivery of the Southland Times and see the photos of the Rose entrants, Lisa and I on the front page. The gang of us take a bus out to Bluff, one of the most southern points of New Zealand. Interestingly most of the street names in this little village are named after Irish Rivers – Slaney Street, Barrow Street, Lee Street, etc. We pose beside the well-known Stirling Point signpost and learn that we are 4,810km from the South Pole –this is likely to be the nearest to the Antarctica I'll ever get. The signpost also indicates that we're 18,958km from London and we make our own sign estimating that we're 19,947km from Tralee! Later in the evening, assemble with my Rosebud Grace and Escort Chaz (baby brother of Lisa) before our grand entrance into the ballroom. Magical evening of Irish dancing, an impromptu recitation by Corkonian Joe Lynch, engaging interviews with the girls, all superbly MC'd. Elizabeth Sara is chosen as the 2010 ambassador. It is so lovely to see new Roses being selected – they have no idea of the incredibly magical journey upon which they are about to embark – and that's what makes it so special.

Sunday

Brunch with the Roses, their families and all involved in the organisation of the 2010 New Zealand Rose Selection. Say our goodbyes to Invercargill and jump on a bus bound for Te Anau. Five minutes down the road and Nicola realises, with horror, that she has left her stash of Barry's teabags behind in the hotel room. Luckily we're home in a week before the withdrawal symptoms really set in!